

S E R M O N S

ON THE

Following S U B J E C T S,

Y I Z.

The immoderate Love of Pleasure.

The great Evil and fatal Effects of it.

The Design of Christ's Appearance.

On our Lord's Temptation.

The Folly of casting off religious Principles.

On keeping the Heart.

**The Paths of the Lord are
Mercy and Truth.**

Christ the Friend of his obedient Disciples.

Godliness explained and recommended.

Glory, Honour and Immortality, the Christian's great End.

BY THE LATE REVEREND

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S E R M O N I.

The immoderate Love of Pleasure
described.

2 TIMOTHY iii. 4.

Lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.

NOTWITHSTANDING the great excellency of the Christian religion, in those perfect rules of morality which it delivers, and the very powerful motives it offers to our consideration to enforce the practice of them ; yet it could not be reasonably expected, either that all would embrace it, to whom the evidence of it should be offered, or that it would constantly produce those good fruits of piety and virtue, it was calculated to promote, in all who might profess to believe it. Principles, however certain and important, as they do not irresistibly operate by any physical or natural necessity, prove too often ineffectual to convince and influence men ; such especially

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who

2 *Immoderate Love of Pleasure described.* Sermon. 1.

who are prepossessed by strong prejudices, and under the government of corrupt passions and inveterate habits of vice. If they will give themselves up to a worldly disposition, and an eager pursuit of sensual gratifications, they must either lose all serious regard to the obligations of true religion, or by some methods or other, shape it according to their favourite inclinations and practices; so that they may have no uneasiness from their course of life, nor any interruption in the pleasures they are determined to indulge.

St. Paul, who without inspiration was a very good judge of human nature, and who by the prophetick spirit that he received foresaw many future events, expressly declares, that there should in process of time be very great corruptions amongst Christians themselves. This know also, that *in the last days perilous times shall come; for men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, beady, high minded, and in the words of my text, Lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; and yet amidst all these corruptions, having a form of godliness, whilst their whole practice was a denial of the power of it. From these, says the Apostle, turn away. Have nothing to do with them, as scandals to Christianity, and enemies of the cross of Christ.*

But

Serm. 1. *Immoderate Love of Pleasure described.* 3

But though the *love of pleasure* is here reckoned amongst the most enormous crimes, it must not be understood as though this was *universally* censured and condemned. The love of pleasure is *natural* to us, and implanted in our very constitution; and there are certain pleasures which we may *reasonably* and *innocently* pursue. The senses with which God hath furnished us, were not given by him in vain, nor opened by his hand only to be shut up by us against the admittance of all those gratifications which he hath rendered them capable of conveying to us. And it is as unnecessary in point of religion on the one hand to bind ourselves to perpetual severities and abstinences, as it is contrary to it on the other to devote ourselves wholly to sensual pursuits and indulgences. Pleasure is far from being absolutely and in itself unlawful, and the inclination to it need not be entirely suppressed. The duty of a Christian is wisely to regulate it, and keep it within the bounds that God and nature hath prescribed it. And whenever in the pursuit or indulgence we transgress these limits, we act inconsistent with our reasonable and Christian characters. The thing censured in the words of my text, is not absolutely the love of sensual pleasure, but *the living in it, the immoderate love of it. Lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, or persons who are lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.* In speaking to these words I shall

4 *Immoderate Love of Pleasure described.* Sermon. 1.

I. Consider the *character* itself described.

And

II. Shew the *unreasonableness* and *evil* of it.

I. I am to consider the *nature* of the *character* itself, or who may justly come under this denomination of loving sensual pleasures *more than God*. One would indeed scarce think it possible that this could be true of any reasonable creature, capable of considering and understanding the perfections and works of God, the relation he bears to him, and the numerous and strong obligations he is under to his power and goodness. The character of God implies in it all that is amiable and lovely, all that deserves esteem, or can attract affection; and the command of *loving God with all the heart and soul and might and strength*, carries in it an unalterable and indispensable fitness. And therefore the loving any thing in opposition to God, or so as to extinguish that love which we owe him, must be extremely unnatural and criminal. And yet it will be found that it is the too prevailing disposition amongst mankind. For

I. When the minds of men are so *entirely engrossed*, and their hearts so fully possessed with the love of sensual pleasure, as to *exclude all considerations of God*, and shut out all manner of regard to his being and perfections, they may justly be said, to be *lovers of pleasure rather than God*. He, as the author of our beings

Serm. I. *Immoderate Love of Pleasure described.* 5

beings, our absolute proprietor, our sovereign Lord, our kind benefactor, our constant friend, our daily inspector, our final judge, our only happiness, is worthy sometimes to employ our most serious thoughts, and an acquaintance with him in the attributes of his nature, and the conduct of his providence, cannot but be both our duty and interest. Our own frame, every thing that is around us, invites us to the contemplation of this infinitely glorious and blessed being, and Heaven and earth conspire to put us in mind of him that spoke them and us into being, and by whose constant visitation we are upheld in life. To a well disposed mind 'tis impossible there can be a more grateful reflection, nor is there a single character or attribute in God, that can give the least uneasiness or pain to one who is not disordered by unnatural passions and criminal affections. If true reason were to guide us, and a just regard to obligation and happiness, to be the rule of our conduct, there would not a single day of life be suffered to pass away, without employing some of our moments in this sacred and delightful work of converse with God, and consecrating part of our thoughts to the meditation of his glory and goodness. *How precious, saith the Psalmist *, are thy thoughts unto me, O God? How great is the sum of them? If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand. When I awake I am still with*

* Psalm cxxxix. 17, 18.

6 *Immoderate Love of Pleasure described.* Sermon. i.

thee. And yet of how many is it true, that *God is not in all their thoughts?* They have no more sense of his being and perfections than if he had no manner of existence, or there was nothing in the whole frame of nature to introduce the remembrance of him into their minds, all they seek after is the gratification of their passions, all the pleasure they relish is what comes by the avenues of their senses, and their whole life is one continued round of amusement and vanity. Just reflection is entirely banished. Considerations of a serious nature are absolutely discarded. They never enquire *whence they are, for what end brought into being, to whom they are accountable, or what their ultimate and principal happiness.* They live absolutely by sight. Invisible objects scarce ever appear to them real. This poor span of life bounds all their hopes and views, and though they exist in the immensity of God, and dwell amidst ten thousand proofs of his being, they have no knowledge of or expectation from him. The one care that possesses them is, how they shall *make provision for the flesh to gratify the lusts thereof* †, and secure that succession of pleasure in which they have placed their happiness. An evident demonstration that they are *lovers of pleasure, rather than lovers of God.* But

2. When men so *closely follow* after the *sensual pleasures* of the present life, as to ren-

† Rom. xiii. 14.

Serm. 1. *Immoderate Love of Pleasure described.* 7

der their minds *incapable of all right dispositions and affections towards God*, they are justly chargeable with the guilt of *loving pleasure rather than God*; because their sensual disposition, and their eager fondness for present gratifications, suppresses all due esteem for him, and is the principal cause why the *love of God dwells not in them*. The prevailing love of pleasure, and the genuine love of God are inconsistent principles, and can neither of them flourish or live, but upon the decay or destruction of the other. If our affection and veneration for God be sincere, and entirely possess and influence our minds, the passion for other inferior objects will lessen, the inclination to all sensual indulgences will be brought under due government and restraint, and the fondness for all criminal gratifications will be absolutely suppressed and extinguished. In consequence of this, the life will not be a perpetual pursuit of amusement and vanity, nor wasted away in the continual quest of worthless or criminal pleasures. The abiding sense of God, a due reverence for his majesty, an high esteem for his infinitely amiable character, and the delighting in him as the center and source of all perfection and excellency, will inspire the noblest sentiments, exalt and purify the mind, turn off the passions from the vanities of life, and introduce those refreshing pleasures and sacred satisfactions into the soul, as shall create a rational indifference towards all earthly perfection, and cause us to look upon all the unnatural

8 *Immoderate Love of Pleasure described.* Sermon. 1.
gratifications of sense, with a sovereign contempt and abhorrence. On the contrary, when the sensual disposition entirely prevails, when the love of pleasure and perpetual attention to it, engrosses all the passions, bewitches the affections, and keeps the soul fast bound in its soft and deceitful enchantments; so that all the fears of God are extinguished, all reverence for his authority is lost, all esteem and affection for him die, hope and trust in him cease, and the ambition to please him, and the desire to be accepted of him is no more: When this is the case, pleasure is substituted in the place of God, and excludes him from that heart that should be consecrated to his love and fear. It argues the same disposition

3. When men are become so absolutely the property of pleasure, and so thoroughly *immersed in sensual gratifications*, as that for the sake of them they entirely *forsake the solemnities of God's worship, both private and publick*, and cast contempt on all those institutions, by which we are to express our dependence on God, our sense of his authority and providence, and to strengthen in our minds the necessary purposes of a sober, righteous and godly life. The reasonings of natural light on this head are as clear and as certain as any can be; that if there is a God he is to be worshipped; and the directory for this worship, in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the most rational and excellent that can be given; that *God is to be worshipped*

Serm. 1. *Immoderate Love of Pleasure described.* 9

in spirit and in truth; by the exercise of pure affections, by the acknowledgment of our dependence on him, by offering our grateful praises for the innumerable benefits we have received from him, and by humbly imploring the continued protection and blessing of his providence and grace, through every future period of our lives. I presume all men, who can draw any conclusions at all, may see the real force of this, and that nothing but unreasonable prejudice, or criminal prepossessions and affections can prevent their owning the truth of it. The *love of God*, in the judgment of Christ, is *the first and great commandment*, and this love of God can never be rightly cherished and maintained in its proper warmth and vigour, without the assistance of a serious and regular piety and devotion. To worship him is one of the most natural dictates of conscience and reason, a duty of eternal and unchangeable obligation, of primary importance and absolute necessity in its very nature. And therefore there can be no affairs of the present life so pressing and urgent, as to be a reasonable excuse of men in the habitual neglect of it. Much less can the pretence of pleasure, which ought never to be considered or made the business of life, justify them in such an omission, it being the highest absurdity to imagine, that pleasure, which ought always to give way to affairs of moment and importance, can ever be a just plea for a constant disregard to
the

10 *Immoderate Love of Pleasure described.* Sermon. 1.
the primary and most sacred obligations of
our being.

Human nature and the imperfection of the present state, doth indeed require a diversity of objects to employ and relieve our minds, and 'tis not to be otherwise expected but that at proper seasons we should unbend from the more serious concerns of our being, that we may renew our strength, collect new vigour, and return to our proper business with recruited spirits, in order to the more effectual discharge of it. And as there are no duties of more certain and indispensable obligation, than those which immediately result from the characters of God, and those certain relations which we bear to him; the casting off all regard to these, and indulging ourselves in a perpetual neglect of them, for the sake of any diversions and pleasures whatsoever, is an instance both of folly and wickedness, and argues such a preference of lesser things to those which are greater, as we ourselves in almost any other case would readily condemn. And I should think, that before men should so much as attempt to make themselves easy in such omissions as these, they should first see if they can fairly disprove the being, perfections and providence of God, or clearly demonstrate that the obligations to piety and devotion are intirely precarious and mistaken, or else plainly shew that there can be any kind of pleasures of such importance and necessity, as to discharge them from these obligations,

Serm. 1. *Immoderate Love of Pleasure described.* 11

gations, and which they can hereafter avow and justify, when God by Christ shall bring them into judgment.

Men may possibly through great stupidity, long inattention, or the prevalence of a sensual disposition, overlook all considerations of this nature ; or they may find out some excuses to palliate this irreverence for God, and to quiet and satisfy themselves in so very criminal a negligence. But surely such expedients as these are very false and delusive, and it becomes reasonable beings to act upon a foundation of greater certainty and safety, and to form their judgment of things by an impartial consideration of and attention to their respective natures and consequences, and not as they are falsely represented by prejudice, passion and inclination, which will always bias the mind, and lead men into the most mistaken and dangerous conclusions. Though the very notion of God includes in it all that is venerable and excellent, and the most natural posture of the soul towards this infinitely glorious being, is that of adoration and worship, and though the most genuine satisfaction results from a rational and fixed devotion ; yet when men are become almost wholly sensual, when they have suppressed all inclination to this sacred exercise, or when the call of pleasure allures and seduces them, they are ready and quick in finding out excuses, or else blindly follow the instinct of their appetites, without ever considering where they lead
them,

them, or into what criminal and dangerous neglects they fall for the sake of indulging them. And by thus *alienating themselves from God*, and entirely divesting themselves of all care and concern about a religious temper and life, they demonstrate, as far as actions are sure proofs of what men most esteem and habitually prefer, that they are *lovers of pleasure rather than God*. Again,

4. This is most evidently the case when men *pursue* such kind of *gratifications*, as are strictly *criminal* in their nature, expressly contrary to the will of God, and *forbidden* either by the *natural law of reason* in our minds, or the *revelation* he hath given us by the Lord Jesus Christ. This argues not only the want of a sincere affection and veneration for God, but in the significant language of sacred writ, is *being enemies to God by wicked works* *. 'Tis indeed I think scarce possible, that men can bear a real enmity to God in their minds, considering him as possessed of infinite perfection and excellency. As such he is the object of love only, and not of aversion and hatred. But then as these pleasures of sin, obstinately followed and habitually indulged, do certainly argue a real opposition to the authority and will of God, as the supream Lord and Governor of the world, as they are a contradiction to the rectitude of his nature, and the holiness of his law, and as they tend to frustrate the great ends of his pro-

* Colos. i. 21.

vidence and moral government, in these views they certainly argue a prevailing hatred of and unnatural aversion to him. And therefore when the pleasures of men are directly and intrinsically criminal, or attended with any unquestionably sinful circumstances, this is the surest evidence that they prefer the pleasures of sin to the favour of God, and that their love of these pleasures hath extinguished in them all due reverence and affection for him, and that they are under the influence of a most unnatural aversion and enmity towards him.

Obedience to the laws of God is so inseparable an effect of the love of him, as that the Apostle tells us, *This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments* *. This is the most certain evidence, this the necessary fruit and consequence of loving God. And therefore if men indulge to a voluptuous life in direct violation of the commandments of God, *how dwells the love of God in them?* In this view the words of our Lord Jesus Christ carry in them the fullest evidence and conviction: *No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other* †. No man's affection and love can be fixed at once upon two opposite and contrary objects, and therefore the prevailing love of sinful pleasure is absolutely inconsistent with, and wholly destructive of the

* 1 John v. 3. † Mat. vi. 24.

14 *Immoderate Love of Pleasure described.* Sermon. 1:
love of God. Now of this kind are all those
sort of gratifications,

1. Which cannot be indulged without a
manifest injury and *lasting prejudice to others* ;
especially without doing them hurt in their
dearest and most valuable interest. All those
pleasures therefore which are at the expence
of the property of others, which are incon-
sistent with the honour, peace and union of
families ; all such as are built upon the ruin
of the virtue, the natural shame and modesty,
the future usefulness and happiness of those
we bend to our inclinations, all such as na-
turally tend to confirm others in their vices,
and to render them hardened, abandoned and
profligate, are pleasures contrary to the na-
ture of things, the dictates of compassion,
the sentiments of generosity, the pleadings
of humanity, the will of God, and irrecon-
cileable with the loving him. For there is
nothing that is more evident, than that the
communicating happiness; and the endeavouring
to confirm others in those dispositions, which
are perfective of human nature, and con-
ducive to the welfare and dignity of it, must
be *agreeable to the will of God*, the *most bene-*
volent of all beings ; and that therefore the
rendering others miserable, and willingly
drawing them into the complicated ruins of
vice, for the sake of our own personal grati-
fications, is one of the highest offences against
the Majesty of Heaven, and absolutely sub-
versive of the ends of his government.
And

2. When

2. When the pleasures we pursue are *inconsistent with our own true welfare and happiness*, they are unjustifiable in their nature, and contrary to the will of God. The consulting our own welfare is a natural dictate, implanted in us by the great author of our nature, and we have no more right, as the subjects of the divine government, to injure and destroy ourselves, than we have to corrupt and ruin others. Reason and religion both strongly oblige us to be provident for our own welfare, and carefully to guard ourselves against every thing that may be in the least detrimental to our natures, inconsistent with the true possession and enjoyment of our beings, or that may incur the forfeiture of the happiness for which we are designed. We hold our natures from God, the universal Proprietor and supream Lord, and therefore have no right to make any waste in his creation, nor to destroy what he hath reserved for his own immediate use and service. And therefore all kind of sensual gratifications, that are destructive of the interests of the present or future state, are criminal invasions of his right, inconsistent with the subjection that we owe him, and irreconcilable with that affection and esteem he deserves from us.

If therefore men indulge to pleasures that are of *too costly and expensive* a nature, and thereby waste and dissipate their own substance, to the ruin of themselves, the impoverishing their families, the straitening themselves

selves in business, the with-holding from or defrauding others of their just dues, or the rendering themselves incapable of the great duties of charity and mercy; such pleasures are in these circumstances absolutely unlawful. What is a plainer dictate of reason and prudence, than that men should be careful to *provide for themselves and families* the supports and conveniences of life? A dictate this, strengthened and enforced by numerous precepts of divine revelation. What is a more essential virtue of human life than *justice*? How can the greater or lesser societies of mankind prosper without *benewolence* and *charity*? Whatever gratifications therefore are inconsistent with a regard to these obligations, are contrary to reason, and all the maxims of religion and virtue. By this same rule all the expences of mens tables, families, and equipage, ought to be carefully regulated. For how agreeable soever to the sensual taste and inclination, the luxury and pomp of life may be, yet the gratifying such a taste, to the impairing our substance, the involving ourselves and families in inextricable difficulties, and the rendering ourselves incapable of answering the just demands of others, is an unpardonable folly and madness, and a crime both against God and man. This consideration should also make men cautious in the choice of their private recreations and *diversions*. Some there are, which how ever lawful in themselves, and how fit soever they may be for persons of larger fortunes, yet are *too costly*

costly for those who are in lower situations of life ; who therefore ought to be content to abide in the stations in which providence hath placed them, without aiming at and coveting the pleasures of richer men, which require greater plenty to furnish and support them. But especially it should make men extreamly cautious how they give into those very expensive and prodigal vices of intemperance, luxury, lewdness, gaming and the like ; vices that scarce any plenty can support, and by indulging which men contract double guilt, as they allow themselves in practices absolutely criminal in their natures, and as they reduce themselves generally, and those for whose happiness they should have the most tender concern, into circumstances of the greatest distress and misery. So true and pertinent is the observation of the royal preacher : *He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man, he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich* *.

Or if men gratify themselves in such indulgences as are *prejudicial to their bodily health*, as well as waste their substance, they act contrary to the law of God, and their *love of pleasure* is *superior* to their *esteem and reverence* for him. As health is one of the most valuable blessings of providence, and the comfort and usefulness of life depend on it, we ought to be very frugal of so excellent a gift, and by all prudent methods to preserve it intire, that we may be the better capable of rightly dis-

* Prov. xxi. 17.

charging the many duties of our station in the world. And therefore the breaking in upon our constitutions, weakening our frame by bodily disorders and pains, and shortening the natural period of life, by criminal indulgences, voluptuous excesses, or irregular pleasures, is an unjustifiable folly, and criminal breach of the divine constitution and order. It is in reality a kind of *suicide* or *self murder*, and oftentimes proves as fatal to men, as if they destroyed themselves by the sword or poison. Sometimes men *immediately reap* the sad fruit of their debaucheries and vices, and die at once as *martyrs* to their lusts and pleasures. At other times they destroy themselves in a more *gradual* and *lingering* manner, though not less effectually, and besides the disorders they bring upon themselves, propagate wretchedness and misery amongst their unhappy descendants, whereby they perpetuate the remembrance of their crimes, and leave behind them monuments of their own infamy and guilt.

The sin is still greater, when men are habituated to pleasures that are immediately and in their nature *hurtful to their minds*, and that tend to weaken or pervert, or vitiate their nobler powers. Of this kind are all those gratifications which tend to obscure their understanding, and corrupt their judgment; to render them averse to, or incapable of consideration and reflection, to harden and stupify their consciences, to wear off that tenderness, *shame*, modesty, sense of honour, and fear of offending,

Serm. 1. *Immoderate Love of Pleasure described.* 19

offending, that God hath implanted in our frame, as guards upon our passions, and to ballance the inclinations and strong propensities of our sensual appetites. This is offering the greatest possible violence to ourselves, debasing and prostituting our souls, which are made after the image of God, laying ourselves open to certain misery and irretrievable destruction, and to extirpate out of our minds all sense of God, and reverence and affection for him.

Or if mens indulgences are such, as *feed and enflame their passions*, heighten their sensual appetites, and strengthen those animal inclinations which they should keep under perpetual restraint and government; this is nourishing in their breasts irreconcilable enemies to the love of God, which is a plant of too tender and delicate a nature to thrive and prosper in the soil where these noxious weeds are harboured and encouraged, which as they grow and encrease will draw from it all that kindly sap which should bring it to its full perfection and beauty, or by their deadly shadow soon destroy it. Wherever this heavenly guest dwells as a fixed companion, she clears the breast of these troublesome invaders, or with a sovereign voice commands them peace, be still, calms every tempest of the mind, reduces all the inferior powers within their bounds, restores reason to its exercise, and conscience to its authority and proper jurisdiction; renders the soul an habitation fit for the God of peace, introduces the purest,

20 *Immoderate Love of Pleasure described.* Sermon 1.
the calmest satisfactions, and opens the heart
to joys unspeakable and full of glory. And there-
fore all those gratifications that *sensualize the*
mind, and bring it under the dominion of ani-
mal affections, and that strengthen the force
and influence of instinctive passions, have an
irreconcilable enmity with the love of God.

And finally, when men for the sake of the
momentary pleasures of sin, *live in an habitual*
neglect of the gospel salvation, and receive all the
promises and offers of the *grace of God by Christ*
in vain, they incur this grievous censure of
my text, of loving pleasure rather than God.
The method of the gospel redemption is a
scheme of divine mercy and goodness, and
the strongest possible demonstration of the sin-
cere and tender love that he bears us : Love
to our souls dictated the gift, that compre-
hensive gift, the only Son of God, to be the
propitiation for our sins, and to rescue us from
the power and condemnation of them. The
salvation he offers us is from *the present evil*
world, the wickedness in which it lies, the
vanities and follies with which it abounds,
and the destructive pleasures it offers to seduce
and deceive men into guilt and ruin. To
accept this salvation God entreats and be-
seeches us by the Lord Jesus Christ, by the
manifestations of his mercy, by the tenderness
of his compassion and the greatness of his
love, by every motive of his grace and good-
ness that can win upon our hearts, or kindly
constrain us to embrace his offers and live.
And if this love of God is rightly appre-
hended,

Serm. 1. *Immoderate Love of Pleasure described.* 21

hended, if it makes the genuine and kindly impressions on our minds, enters into our affections and gains our hearts, it will awaken in us all the strongest sentiments of gratitude, and the just return of the warmest affection and esteem. The consequence of this will necessarily be, a thankful acknowledgment of the grace that hath appeared to us in Christ, and a most willing and chearful acceptance of that salvation by him, which is the noblest instance and proof of this grace. All the advantages of the present world, all the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season, when offer'd in lieu of this salvation, will be looked on with contempt, and rejected with the scorn they deserve. Whatever would render us indifferent to the heavenly offer, or divert us from our endeavours to secure it, will be looked on with jealousy, and avoided with the utmost care and caution. Even the lawful comforts of life will be used with the greatest moderation, and the guilty gratifications of sinners shunned as worse than a destructive plague or immediate death. In a word, when under a warm sense of the love of God to us, and the sacred impulse of a sincere and affectionate love to him, we are in good earnest solicitous to obtain salvation, and prevailed with heartily to accept it, even the most grateful and favourite indulgences of life, that are inconsistent with the obtaining it, will be wholly renounced, and nothing will be thought too dear to sacrifice to this infinitely more important concern, the salvation

of our souls. How utterly void therefore of the love of God must the voluptuary and sensualist be, who neglects this great salvation, and turns a deaf ear to all the tender invitations of God, and feels no charm in that sacred voice, that persuades him to accept of eternal grace; who, for the sake of a momentary gratification, the indulging an unworthy passion, the unmanly pleasures of sin, the shadowy amusements of life, the fantastick vanities and gilded follies of the world, contracts an indifference to the most substantial offers of divine goodness, and grows insensible to all that mighty sum of blessedness, comprehended in those truly important words: *Eternal Redemption*. What is there in the pleasures of life that thus fascinate and bewitch the minds of men? Are there any real substantial blessings that flow from a voluptuary course? Is private happiness, or the publick good to be promoted and secured by indulgences of this kind? Any one valuable interest of time or eternity connected with them? No. 'Tis a course productive of innumerable evils, inconsistent with all principles of true honour, publick spirit, prudence and happiness, as will be shewn you, God willing, the next opportunity.

S E R M O N II.

The great Evil of Excess in the Love
of Pleasure.

2 TIMOTHY iii. 4.

Lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.

I Have, in a former discourse on these words, largely described the *character* here mentioned by St. Paul, and shewn who may be justly charged as *lovers of pleasure rather than God*; such whose minds are so entirely engrossed with the love of sensual pleasure, as to exclude all considerations of God, or who hereby render themselves incapable of all right dispositions and affections towards him, or who on this account contract an indifference and aversion to all the instances of piety and devotion, or who pursue such gratifications as are strictly criminal in their nature, and therefore expressly contrary to the will of God; such as cannot be indulged without a manifest injury and prejudice to others, especially in their most valuable interests, or consistently with our own happiness and usefulness; such as dissipate our substance, or

our health, or make waste in our minds and consciences, or enflame our passions, and make us negligent and careless as to our final and eternal salvation.

II. I now proceed to the second general, which is to set before you *the great evil* of such a disposition as this, and the *many bad consequences* that attend the immoderate love and criminal pursuit of pleasure. There is nothing more fatal to all the valuable interests of our beings, or that carries in it more certain destruction to private or publick happiness. This I would prove under two heads.

I. Offering to your thoughts some considerations in *direct proof* of the great guilt of indulging to this sensual disposition. And

II. Represent in a more extensive view the evil of an immoderate love and pursuit of pleasure.

I. I would offer to your thoughts some considerations in direct proof of the folly, sin, and danger of the particular temper condemned in my text, of *loving pleasure more than God*. And one would think that the very mention of the thing should carry such a conviction of its unreasonableness and impiety, as no one who gives himself any room to reflect should be able to resist. For

1. The love of God is a duty of the very first and highest obligation. This is expressly asserted by our Lord. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, This is the first and*

and great commandment *; superior to all others in its importance and influence. And it is evidently so, not only upon the foot of authority, but upon all the principles of the most certain truth and reason. For if God be the *best* of all beings, if every possible excellence dwells in him in the most absolute and perfect manner, and if there be nothing in him to create indifference, to awaken aversion, to excite enmity, or to inspire horror and dread in the mind of any reasonable being, 'tis as evident that he is to be *loved with supream affection*, as it is that what is lovely should be loved at all, or that what is most lovely deserves to be loved best. Besides the reasonableness of loving God above all other objects, appears not only from his own infinitely amiable character, as founded in the most perfect rectitude of his nature, but from the *many obligations and benefits* we have ourselves received from him, upon which account this supream veneration and esteem for him is a debt of gratitude and justice. Whatever there is of natural and moral excellency in our frame is originally his gift. All the real blessings of our lives, that contribute to the welfare, happiness, and honour of our beings, we possess by the permission and under the direction of his providence. So that all the characters of Creator, Preserver, Benefactor, gracious Governor, Father, Friend, and Redeemer, conspire to excite in our minds

* Matt. xxii. 37, 38.

the warmest affection towards him, and render him every way worthy of the highest veneration and esteem of the whole rational creation. If therefore there are any arguments capable of persuading us, or any motives of sufficient power to influence us, they all unite to engage our hearts in the love of God. What then must be the state of that mind where this sacred passion finds no admission! What substantial darkness must possess it, if it discerns no excellency in this most adorable being! What horrid perverseness, if acknowledging his unparalleled perfections, it esteems and loves the sensual pleasures of life in preference of him? How desperate must that ingratitude be, where under innumerable obligations for the most valuable blessings, the hand that bestows them is never regarded, and a greater value put on the blessings themselves, than on the goodness that confers them? Can any thing argue a more perverted judgment, a more degenerate mind, or a more unnatural disposition, than such a fondness for the gratifications of sense, as estranges the heart from infinite, eternal, and immutable perfection, and fills it with an incurable enmity to the great original, and indefectible source of good. Especially considering

2. *The nature and kind of those pleasures that are thus preferred by sensual men before God. Were the pleasures they pursue ever so excellent in their nature, and even of the highest consequence to the happiness of*

of the present life, yet still this could not justify the loving them more than God, and preferring the enjoyment of them to his acceptance and favour. But this is far from being the case. The pleasures they spend their lives in quest of, have *no peculiar worth* and goodness in them, and are by no means *necessary* to the welfare and enjoyment of our beings. Thousands are without them, who to say the least are equally happy with those who have them in the greatest abundance, and oftentimes unspeakably more so. Many who have it in their power to purchase them, look on them as contemptible, as mere empty amusements, as criminal gratifications, and know by experience that true happiness hath no dependence on them, and that the more they can live abstracted from them, the more they strengthen their relish for every rational satisfaction and enjoyment. They are in many instances the pleasures only of *imagination, fancy, and false opinion*, that have no reality and truth in them; that owe all their power of pleasing to a bad taste and a perverted judgment, and are therefore the very lowest and meanest that men are capable of enjoying. They are pleasures suited only to the *mere animal life*, the inferior, sensitive part of our frame, in many of which the very brutes themselves have a large share, and probably oftentimes a much stronger relish of them than themselves, which never enter into the mind, and have not the least tendency to exercise and entertain the rational faculties of our natures. Yea, they
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are such too often, as true reason directs men wholly to shun, and their best interest leads to suppress every kind of inclination to them. They are frequently extremely *dishonourable* to those who indulge them, fill them with infamy and guilt, render them averse to all the noblest pleasures of life, make them enemies to their own true perfection and happiness, and prove in their consequences bitterness and sorrow. 'Tis for the sake of these imaginary, fantastick, spurious and adulterous pleasures, that sensual men contract an habitual settled indifference to him, whose perfection renders him worthy the highest veneration, and that they forsake him, from the knowledge and love of whom they might derive the purest, the most durable and worthy satisfactions. And

3. This folly is still the more inexcusable and amazing, in that men may enjoy *every valuable pleasure* in life, that they can reasonably desire, or wisely wish, and yet at the same time *maintain that supream affection* which they owe to God, and secure all the valuable fruits of his friendship and favour. God hath not, that I can find, any where abridged men of any satisfactions, that they can in judgment and prudence, and consistent with their duty and best interest, allow themselves. Even our bodily appetites, as far as regular and moderate, are implanted in us by the great author of our frame, and are his wise provision for the support and comfort of the present life; and there are gratifications peculiar to them,
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which when enjoy'd with a becoming temperance can never be criminal in their nature, and therefore not offensive to the God of nature. The senses which he hath inserted into our frame, plainly appear to have been intended by him to be so many various sources of pleasing entertainment to us. He hath opened the eye, that we might contemplate the magnificence, and take in the innumerable beauties of the creation all around us. He hath formed the ear to receive the harmony of sounds. The food that supports us is designed as well to please the taste as to satisfy our hunger. And therefore it can be no part of true religion to open the eye only to deformity, and the ear only to harsh and unpleasing discord, and the taste only to that which is bitter and offensive. The external blessings of plenty and riches, that God in his providence hath bestowed on some, more liberally than on others, were given them as means to purchase more of the advantages and conveniences of life, than fall to the share of those in more contracted circumstances. And they have a right to use them for their own benefit, and procure every thing, that properly falls within the compass of them, that may contribute to the ornament, elegance, or even splendor of life, as well as to supply the mere necessities of it; provided the spirit of true piety and goodness be not lost amidst these amusements and gratifications, nor the disposition and ability for any of the important duties of our Christian character

character injured and destroyed by them. And how many valuable satisfactions are there of the present state, that may be enjoyed consistent with all the interests of religion and virtue? Where doth the law of Christ abridge us of any thing that is reconcileable with integrity, and that care to secure better blessings, which every one, that will allow himself seriously to consider, knows to be his unquestionable interest? And is not this a demonstration of the folly and madness of an entirely sensual and voluptuary life, that banishes God from the heart, and renders the mind incapable of the exercise of all right affections towards him? If a regular, sober, and prudent enjoyment of the world be reconcileable with the love of God, true reason cannot possibly desire more. If all the valuable satisfactions of the present state may be had, without lessening that veneration and esteem we owe to him, and even made subservient to establish and increase this sacred disposition, the pleasures that are destructive of it must be exceeding irrational, criminal and pernicious. To be wholly abandoned to sensual gratifications, to surfeit ourselves with pleasures, to eat to excess, to drink to drunkenness, to enjoy the good things of life 'till we forget that God who gives them, and to contract such a prevalent affection towards sensible objects, as renders us reluctant to converse with him, incapable of the exercise of gratitude for his benefits, and raises in us a settled opposition to his government
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and will ; this argues high ingratitude to the great Author of all good for the liberal allowance he hath made us of the comforts of life, is a monstrous abuse of the favours of his providence, and shews a temper utterly lost to all ingenuity and sense of honour. I add farther

4. That if there be any *solid and substantial pleasures* which human nature is capable of enjoying, and which are of *superior estimation and worth*, they are such as *result* from the *love of God*, and from that religious and virtuous life which is the natural and genuine fruit of it. Let any man but impartially enter into the nature of things, and weigh the pleasures of sense and reason in a fair balance against each other, and he can never be at a loss to form a true judgment concerning them, nor where to give the preference. Supposing the gratifications we pursue are from things in themselves lawful, the mere amusements of life, and our pleasure to arise from elegance of dress, the plenty of our tables, splendour of equipage, magnificence of furniture, gay assemblies, and the fashionable diversions of the polite and rich ; what sort of pleasure and satisfaction is it that arises from all this ? Is it manly, lasting, and that will bear cool reflection ? Will the review of it please in retirement ? If we have no other source of happiness, will it last and supply us in all the various changes and great emergencies of our being ? If our great employment be the adorning our bodies, and we
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study principally the exactness of mode, and the elegance of fashion in our dress, and when viewing ourselves in the flattering mirror, we grow enamoured with our own form, and admire our choice of ornaments, their exact disposition, the help they are to feature and complection, the lustre and gracefulness with which they embellish us, and their power to make us shine in an assembly, and to attract the eye and draw the admiration of others that behold us, let us enquire what kind of satisfaction all this is. Is it not the little irrational pleasure of childhood, that all wise parents endeavour early to correct? Whence doth it arise? From any thing internal, from moral perfection, the comely habit of a good mind, and the true elegance of a wisely ordered and well governed heart? No. All comes from the worm that cloaths thee, the imagination that adorns thee, the eye that beholds and the tongue that flatters thee. But are these the things that rational beings should pride themselves in? Are those the only pleasures that we should live to pursue, that we should be eternally fond of, and place all our happiness in? Run through the whole circle of these amusements, and when made the business of life, they will appear in the light of truth, to be nothing better than pleasing follies, and the entertainments only of little and uncultivated minds.

But the pleasures of men addicted to criminal gratifications deserve an infinitely worse name.

name. They are really the extravagancies of madness, or the desperate adventures of men with bankrupt consciences, or the thoughtless follies of persons destitute of reason and wholly void of understanding, and are no more to be numbered amongst the genuine pleasures that belong to human nature, than those which distracted persons and ideots enjoy, as the effects of a wild or weak imagination. Whereas the satisfactions that arise from conscious piety and virtue, flow from the most perfect order and fullest possession of the mind. They are the genuine dictates of sober reason, an enlightened conscience, and a clear understanding; that proceed from cool and deliberate reflection, and therefore spring out of the mind itself, are the pleasures properly of the reasonable being, and for this reason the most substantial and worthy. To contemplate God as the creator and governor of the universe, as the common father of the whole reasonable creation, as the author of all the various powers and perfections that are dispersed throughout the several classes of beings, and all the kinds and degrees of happiness that the living respectively possess; to converse with him as overruling all things by unerring wisdom, as making all things conduce to the general advantage by an irresistible power and unwearied goodness; to consider him as immediately interested in all the concerns of our beings, and as by inclination and promise engaged to make all things work together for

our good ; and on these accounts to adore and magnify his name, to celebrate his goodness, to own our dependence on him, and establish our faith and trust in him by fervent prayer, to love him for his unparalleled excellencies, to exercise habitual gratitude for his constant benefits, to rest in him as our portion and happiness, and to yield all the substantial fruits of these sacred dispositions, by a prevailing conformity of our actions to the example and will of God, and to have the testimony of our own hearts to the sincerity of such a temper and such a life ; the pleasures that flow from these sources are pure without mixture, real without deceit, satisfactory without disappointment, permanent without change, grateful in review, constant in every possible alteration of circumstance, and the earnest of those substantial and incorruptible pleasures that are at God's right hand, and last for evermore. How amazing then the folly of bartering away these satisfactions for the delusive pleasures of sin ! To exclude the love of God out of our hearts, and those exalted satisfactions that receive their being and nourishment from this heavenly principle, for the sake of more freely indulging the gratifications of sense and imagination ; what is it but to exchange *solid enjoyment* for mere *empty amusement*, and the nobler entertainments of a *rational and divine life*, for the low, sordid, precarious gratifications of a *merely animal and brutal* one. And finally,

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5. What shews the infinite danger of such an habitual temper and course is, that even these pleasures that now so entirely captivate men, and engross their affections and time, *will in the end be productive of bitterness and sorrow.* It is, I think, impossible that men devoted to a life of sensitive indulgences can be easy in their own minds, but either as the effect of a fixed resolution to banish all thought about the consequences of their actions, or through the opiate of false principles, substituting somewhat in the room of true piety and goodness, or by running wholly into infidelity, and making an intire shipwreck of faith and a good conscience. By these methods men may attain to a great deal of insensibility, and keep themselves tolerably free, in a voluptuous course, from the reproaches and terrors of their own consciences. But how truly wretched is the condition that needs these remedies? How false that security of mind that is derived from such causes? Is a man's danger *ever the less*, merely because he is resolved *never to think of it*? Or is his distemper like to be the *less fatal*, because he *stupifies himself* that he may never feel his pain, or be sensible of his danger? Or will his eternal shipwreck be the less certain and fatal, only because he throws away his compass, and laughs at the thought of a storm of future vengeance.

Every object in nature demonstrates a God, and upon this principle nothing is more absolutely certain than the obligations of religion

and virtue. Our reasonable natures declare us accountable, and a future state of rewards and punishments stands inseparably connected with these great articles, which no reasonings can ever disprove, nor the most subtle arguments ever render in the least improbable. In how dreadful a situation do these reflections place the sensualist and libertine? What account can he give of life, that neglects all the essential duties of it, and lives only to indulge the instincts of appetite, and feed the follies of a distempered imagination? How will he like and endure the figure he must make in a future world, when his mind shall appear furnished with nothing but images of shewy trifles, gaudy vanities, and splendid delusions; and his whole life one continued pursuit of shining bubbles, golden dreams, and gay diversions; absolutely unconscious to all the worthiest dispositions of human nature, and wholly void of all those fruits of righteousness, without which no man can be beheld by God with approbation? But how dreadful, how loathsome a spectacle to God and man will the wretch be, on whom shall be found the deep imprinted marks †, furrowed in his soul by criminal gratifications, and the horrid stains of guilty pleasures? How will he be amazed at the judgment seat of God, when every act of intemperance, luxury and lust, shall be brought to view, and set before his eyes; when all his expensive vices, and costly

† Vid. Lucian.

indulgences of sin, shall be recalled to his remembrance ; when he shall be charged home as the tempter and corrupter of others, and as the instrument of their ruin to subserve his own passions, and stand bowing under the tremendous weight of his own and other mens crimes ? The man of pleasure may smile at this representation as fictitious and imaginary. But yet he knows he cannot disprove it, no nor wholly get free from the apprehension and terror of these possibilities. And should they at length prove real, what can save him from this complicated guilt, or deliver him from the lowest depths of everlasting perdition ? Surely *these ungodly shall not stand in judgment, nor sinners of this rank in the congregation of the righteous !*

In this light, what can we think of the pleasures of sin ? Doth it not immediately dissolve the charm, and shew the infinite hazard of being beguiled and bound by the soft enchantment ? What judgment must we pass on the character of my text, *Loving pleasure more than God ?* Is it not departing from the fountain of living waters, and hewing out to ourselves broken cisterns that can hold no waters ? Is it not forsaking our own mercy, cherishing destruction in our bosoms, and for the sake of a momentary, agreeable delusion, madly exposing ourselves to the most substantial and durable misery ? But thus much as to the *first* thing, the *evil, folly, and danger* of loving pleasure more than God. I now proceed

II. To the *second*, which is to consider in a little *more extensive view* the evil of an *immoderate love and pursuit of pleasure*, sacrificing all other interests to this, or making it the one great object of our view, and business of our lives. The *man of pleasure* is no rare character in the times in which we live. How few families are there comparatively to be found, in which there is not one or more of this complection? How numerous are the opportunities for and incentives to pleasure, that abound every where in the midst of us, to catch thoughtless minds, and deceive them out of their time, their substance, their virtue, and their happiness? And are not persons of all ranks and degrees, in all societies and communions, entering into the common snare, and adding strength and authority to the growing evil, by the countenance of their example? Where must these things end, or who can be at a loss to foretel their consequences, if some speedy check be not put to them, by the prudent interposition of the legislature, or by a severer but more sovereign remedy, the rebukes of providence? If indeed men would but impartially consider the nature of things, and enter seriously into the bad effects of such a temper and practice, effects that all histories furnish them with, and that are every day visible amongst us at home, one would think they should need no other motives to check such a disposition in themselves, and discountenance it in othes, as far as their influence and authority will reach. You will not take it amiss,
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if I represent to you the nature and consequences of such a spirit, as they appear to my mind ; and indeed they appear to me in every circumstance of terror and ruin. Consider,

1. How *contemptible* and *low* the character of a *man of pleasure* is ! How mean the figure he makes in life ! a little, poor, insignificant, useless creature, made up of selfish views, sordid schemes, and dishonourable pursuits ! His mind an uncultivated waste, in which nothing manly, generous, amiable, and good, prospers, void of knowledge in every thing useful, stript of all benevolent passions, and a stranger to all those excellent virtues, which are the great ornaments of human nature : One who is continually in quest of impertinent amusements, or who rejoiceth in nothing but the indulgence of his appetites, or who is continually sinking himself deeper into the guilt of the most criminal gratifications. He is one whose mind is entirely disabled from all the noblest exercises of reason, who looks on the study of all serious things with contempt and aversion. His thoughts run no higher than the caprice of fashion, the elegance of dress, the gay diversions of the times, to kill reflection, and waste away the tedious hours of life ; and are oftentimes much worse employed, in studying to deceive, betray, and ruin others, by drawing them in to be partners in his pleasures, and minister to his vilest passions and inclinations. Your *men of pleasure*, in conversation, are the most empty and unfurnished creatures in the world,

or the most offensive and shocking. They want ideas to bear a part in the solid entertainments of men of sense and reason, and as to all subjects of importance in human life, are as little capable almost of entering into them as ideots or children. If they shine, it is only by their dress or equipage, by plausible impertinence, by exactness of taste in trifles, by depth of judgment in fashionable follies, by a little wit and raillery in favour of vice, or at the expence of decency, good breeding, religion and virtue. And frequently their conversation is much lower than this, and descends to subjects that a good mind scorns to think of, modesty and sense of honour blush at the very mention of, and to delight in which argues the most abandoned and profligate conscience; in which the name of God is never mentioned but to profane and blaspheme it, nor religion introduced, but to shew they are mad enough to insult and renounce it.

And are not there amongst the very lowest of the human species, and even amidst all the advantages of fortune and birth, worthy the contempt of every sensible person that beholds them; who, to consider them in the most favourable light, are a composition of ignorance, dulness, affectation, impertinence, indolence, and folly; who mean nothing good, who aim at nothing great, who live for no valuable use and purpose, and are in truth the mere cyphers of human life; and who, to consider them in another view, are
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in reality, how strong soever the expression may be, the *miscreant part* of the human species, who sacrifice not only all that is valuable in themselves, but as far and as often as they can, all that is sacred and excellent in others to their own gratifications and pleasures.

2. But this love of pleasure is not only low and contemptible, but extremely *diskonourable* and *infamous*, which no splendid titles, no elevation of condition, no height of fortune, can extenuate or conceal. Ask even a civilized *beathen* in what true worth and dignity of character consist, what renders any man truly noble and great; and he will tell us, 'tis not birth, or ancestors, or titles, or wealth, or any of those external circumstances, in which men so greatly pride themselves; but that *virtue is the only true nobility*, and that *real greatness* consists in the possession of *moral excellency*, in *sanctity of character*, in the love of *justice*, and in an *universal regard to truth* in conversation and practice. Nor is there any one thing that the *wisest* men of *antiquity* have stigmatized with more odious characters, and severe reproaches, than the intemperate love and indulgence of pleasure. 'Tis in its nature *brutal* *. A man of pleasure is wholly degenerated into sense and appetite, and lives by

* Illud tamen arcte tenent, accurateque, defendunt, voluptatem esse summum bonum. Quæ quidem mihi vox pecudum videtur esse, non hominum. Tu enim, cum tibi sive Deus, sive mater, ut ita dicam, rerum omnium, natura, dederit animum, quo nihil est præstantius, neque divinius, sic te ipse abjicies atque prosterneſ, ut nihil inter te, atque quadrupedem aliquam putes inter esse? Cicero. Paradox. c. 4.

no other or better principle than the beasts that perish. 'Tis mere bodily instinct that governs him, imagination that perpetually deludes him, caprice and humour that are the sole rules of his conduct. He is in a state of the most abject *slavery*, and in bondage to the most imperious and cruel masters. The habits of sensuality destroy the natural freedom of the mind, and eradicate the sentiments and love of liberty, and leave men in full possession of the vilest and most infamous affections; insomuch that though frequently honour, sense of duty, conscience and interest all exclaim against their practices, they are almost irresistibly drawn into their accustomed indulgences, in spite of all the consequences of ruin that are before them. It naturally tends to indolence and sloth, to unnerve and unbrace the vigilant and active powers, and frequently throws men into that indolent state, creates in them that indifference to exercise, and fills them with that hatred to all diligence and labour, as renders their whole lives an inglorious state of rest and idleness, except it be when some new scene of pleasure awakens them out of their lethargy, and their appetites stimulate them on afresh to some irregular and criminal gratification.

And how *base* and infamous are the *methods* by which they generally pursue these. If we place the man of pleasure in the most favourable light we can, and consider him only as continually busied in and delighted with the glare, ostentation, the pomp, and splendid amusements

amusements of life, how scandalous is the waste of time consumed in them, how shamefully is the improvement of the mind neglected for the sake of them, how monstrously the great end of life forgotten and perverted, through an attention to them. If the love of pleasure leads men further than these, into really criminal excesses, the infamy of a voluptuous course is in proportion much greater, and throws the foulest stain upon those who indulge them. How lost to all decency are the men that live only to satisfy the cravings of an intemperate and luxurious appetite, and spend their time and estates in the feasts of a delicious and extravagant table. Oh ! how is human nature debased, and all the dignity of it prostituted and trampled under foot, by the debauches of wine, by riot and by drunkenness, when the powers of reason are all laid asleep, and the man transformed into somewhat more wretched and vile than the most despicable insect ; when every impious suggestion takes place, when all the brutal passions seize him, and he becomes fitted to perpetrate every enormity of vice, without reflection to preserve, or conscience to controul him ; when fools and madmen laugh him to scorn, and thoughtful and sober men look on him with a mixture of abhorrence, indignation and compassion. Other pleasures of vice there are, which are pursued and purchased by such means as are abhorrent to all principles and sentiments of honour, which
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shew men destitute of every thing great and good in their minds, and whatever be their titles, dignity, rank, and plenty in life, demonstrate them to be men of the most abject dispositions ; and as to moral excellency and worth, entirely divested of it. Such are the men of pleasure, who lay snares to ruin innocence, who condescend to entreaties, persuasions, bribes, oaths, flatteries, promises, threatenings, and all the accursed arts and methods that their own perfidious and cruel hearts can inspire them with, to corrupt others, for their own gratifications, into shame and guilt, and irretrievable destruction ; men that are the abhorrence of God, and the shame, the reproach and curse of human society ; who are relentless to all the miseries they cause, and spread ruin wherever they can prevail, without shedding a tear over the waste of which they are the authors ; who enter into families frequently only with a view to undo them, and put an end to their peace ; and to dissolve the tenderest and most endearing relations of life, or to render those between whom they subsist, the most substantial plagues and torments to each other, as long as ever they continue. The treachery and baseness of such a character, though I want words to express, yet God hath abundant vengeance in store, by *terrible things in righteousness*, to repay. The truth is, that a life of mere sensual pleasure, in every view of it, is beneath the dignity of human nature, and the
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the character of a man of pleasure, a perpetual infamy and reproach to him that deserves it. But

3. A life of pleasure is the most *useless* and *unprofitable* *. There is not a more insignificant creature that breathes than the habitual sensualist. He doth not merit the air he draws, nor deserve a place on the earth that sustains him. They are the mere *excrescences* of human life, that add no comeliness, strength or safety to it, but deform and often prey upon the sounder parts of society, and by the corrupt humours they nourish and spread, endanger the welfare of it. How unprofitable is the life they lead to themselves, as to all the valuable purposes and views of living! Wholly sunk in sense, they forget they have a mind to cultivate, or a soul to save. Being the mean property of bodily appetites and animal passions, what generous affections, what manly dispositions, what virtuous habits can they cherish and strengthen? Being able to relish nothing but what is gross, or fantastick and imaginary, the taste for knowledge is lost, the desire of moral improvement ceases, and the disposition and ability for every great and valuable attainment languish and die. To futurity they are almost absolutely blind, accustomed to live by sight, they ridicule all the objects of faith, think Heaven at

* Ut tribuamus aliquid voluptati, condimenti fortasse non nihil, utilitatis certe nihil habebit. Cicer. de Off. l. 3 in fin.

too great a distance to deserve their care; and are too impatient and fond of present enjoyments, to govern their conduct by the expectations and hopes of any thing that is hereafter to come. So that they are born, and live and die without wisdom, carry out of the world with them as little valuable intellectual furniture as they brought into it, and enter that eternal state, which employs the thoughts and cares of every prudent mind, without having ever guarded against its possible miseries, or acquired one single qualification that can secure them the happiness and glory it may be capable of yielding them.

Consider them in a *social* view, and they will be found absolutely incapable of serving the interests of those they are united with. The very example they give in the private relation of a family, tends to infect and destroy the several branches of it. What tender concern can they have for the real happiness of others, who have no knowledge of or concern for their own? How can it be expected that they should form the minds of their children into sentiments of truth, love of virtue, or disposition for usefulness, in whose own hearts the love of pleasure hath destroyed these? In what can they assist them by instruction and discourse, who know how to converse about nothing beyond the diversions they are fond of, and have no taste for any kind of rational entertainment and improvement. As to real friendship, men of
pleasure

pleasure are never to be trusted, 'tis impossible they can support it, the love of pleasure being destructive of all those benevolent and social affections on which it is founded, and so engrosses them for the pursuit of what is grateful to their own senses and imaginations, as that they have no leisure or inclination cordially to consult how they may serve the advantage of another. Or if they profess a friendship for others, 'tis a friendship which must be fatal to those who embrace it, and carries in it the most powerful temptation to draw them into a sensual and voluptuary course. As to all the valuable arts and sciences of life, they can be of little or no possible assistance to cultivate and improve these; this requiring serious thought, close application, diligent study, abstractedness from the amusements of life, and a fixed attention of mind to the subject in pursuit, to all which the sensualist is naturally averse, and cannot but be under an habitual and strong aversion. In all the great emergencies of state, what benefit can the publick receive? How can he assist by counsel and advice, who hath all his life been disused to grave and manly reflection? What resolution can be expected from him in times of danger, who hath contracted an habitual indolence, and grown into an aversion to all the services of a vigorous and active life? How will he appear and act as a magistrate? Can he be otherwise than remiss in the execution of those

those laws, that are a restraint upon his own conduct; or favourable to offenders, for whose crimes he hath an apology in his own breast? Can he bravely stem the torrent of abounding vice, who is himself a pattern of it, or with authority correct transgressors, who shares an equal or perhaps superior guilt with them. I wish that the example of the past or present times did not abundantly convince us, that *men of pleasure* cannot act as *magistrates* with integrity, nor the publick virtue ever be secured, whilst they are intrusted with the execution of those laws, which are formed for the protection and encouragement of it. The many excellent statutes that we have amongst ourselves for the discouragement of vice and immorality, one would think should be sufficient to put some check to the abounding of it. And therefore one would be apt to wonder whence it comes to pass, that all the extravagances of vice are so frequently committed in the midst of us. If indeed profligates and libertines preside over these laws, 'tis easy to be accounted for; when wickedness sits in high places, it will naturally soon spread its dire infection through every inferior state around it; the consequence of which general corruption of manners must be sooner or later the dissolution of the publick peace and order, which will draw after it other consequences subversive of the welfare and liberties of these kingdoms.

But

But this would lead me into another head of discourse that would furnish many useful reflections; viz. the unspeakably *bad consequences* of this immoderate love of pleasure, and that to the cause of religion, to all the private interests of particular persons, and the being and continuance of the publick happiness, which will deserve a farther particular consideration.



S E R M O N III.

Voluptuousness destructive of real
Piety.

2 TIMOTHY iii. 4.

Lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.

I Have in two former discourses from these words shewn you, the *nature of the character* here described, of loving pleasure more than God, and the *unreasonableness and folly* of such a disposition ; because the love of God is a duty of the very first and highest obligation ; the sensual pleasures that men are so criminally fond of, are by no means worthy the preference which is given them ; men may enjoy every valuable and reasonable pleasure in life consistent with that supreme love for God which he deserves, if there be any solid and substantial pleasures which human nature is capable of enjoying, and which are of superior estimation and worth, they are such as result from the love of God, and that religious and virtuous life which is the genuine fruit of it ; and finally,

finally, because these immoderate and irregular pleasures must, in the end, upon all true principles of religion, be productive of bitterness and sorrow.

I have also shewn you the *evil* of this inordinate love of pleasure in a more *extensive view* from these three considerations; 'tis *contemptible* and base, 'tis *dishonourable* and infamous, 'tis wholly *useless* and unprofitable. I now proceed to represent to you the farther evil of such a disposition and conduct, in the innumerable *bad consequences* that attend it, and the destructive influence of it, upon every valuable interest of human nature and life. And let us here consider it particularly,

I. As it affects men in a *religious* view.
And

II. In the *secular* concerns of the present life.

I. Let us consider this *voluptuary* temper and life as it affects men in a *religious* view, and we shall find there is nothing more *unfriendly to true piety*, or more absolutely inconsistent with the life and power, the spirit and practice of it.

When I speak of religion and piety I would be understood to mean that reverence and regard which is due to God, both in disposition and practice, which is founded in principle, and to which he hath a just claim, upon account of the infinite perfection and rectitude of his nature, the character he sustains, and our own unquestionable dependance on

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and relation to him ; agreeable to the plainest dictates of our consciences and reason, the doctrine taught and the directions given us in the gospel revelation.

There is nothing more evident, than that Christianity absolutely condemns this disposition and character I have been representing to you, and particularly declares it irreconcilable with its governing design, and the due care of our salvation and eternal happiness. It is described as exceeding criminal. These *lovers of pleasures* are numbered amongst the most profligate and impious part of mankind, *covetous, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, without natural affection* *, and others the most abandoned and criminal offenders, as you may see a few verses before my text. St. John tells us, that *all that is in the world* †, every thing that the world can afford sensual men, may be comprehended under these three, *the lusts of the flesh*, all the gratifications of impure and intemperate men ; *the lust of the eyes*, or the immoderate love of riches, splendid habitations, costly furniture, sumptuous cloathing, gay equipage, and the like, with which the generality feed and feast their eyes ; *and the pride of life*, or those high honours and dignities, places and preferments, splendor and pomp of appearance, which are the great objects of an ambitious temper, and frequently inspire men with insolence and pride. *All this*, saith the Apostle, *is not of*

* 2 Tim. iii. 2, 3, 4.

† 1 John ii. 16.

the father. All passions and affections of this nature are neither excited by him, nor agreeable to his will. And therefore he adds, *that if any man loves the world*, if the love of these things be the prevailing passion, and engrosses his heart and affections, *the love of the father is not in him* *; it is impossible he can have any becoming affection and esteem for God. Nay, we are assured in stronger terms, that *the friendship of the world is enmity with God*, and that *whosoever will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God* †; because that imitation of and conformity to a wicked world, in their criminal indulgences and pursuits, which is implied in friendship with it, argues a real alienation from him, and hatred to the design of his providence and moral government. Hence this sensual disposition and voluptuary course of life is expressly forbidden. *Take heed, saith our blessed Lord, to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this life* ‡. *Be ye not conformed to this world* ||, says the inspired Apostle, *let us walk honestly, with decency and dignity, as the original word signifies, as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, nor in chamberings and wantonness, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof* §. It is also severely threatened. *Rejoice, O young man in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes* **; gratify

* 1 John ii. 15.

† James iv. 4.

‡ Luke xxi. 34.

|| Rom. xii. 2.

§ xiii. 13, 14.

** Eccles. xi. 9.

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 all thy passions, and take thy fill of pleasure ;
 but take this along with thee if thou dost :
Know thou, that for all these things God will bring
*thee into judgment ** ; so that the words are an
 exhortation to follow their pleasures at their
 peril, and therefore are in reality the strongest
 prohibition of such a course. And St. Paul
 after mentioning some of the criminal gratifi-
 cations of voluptuous men, says, *for these*
things sake the wrath of God cometh on the chil-
dren of disobedience †. And the Apostle James,
 speaking of the corrupt state of the Jews,
 assigns it as one grand cause of the ruin
 with which he threatened them : *Ye have lived*
in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton ‡, or
 as the word more properly signifies, fared de-
 liciously and lived in luxury. *Ye have nou-*
rished your hearts as in a day of slaughter, or
 rather, as for, or against a day of slaughter ;
 elegantly comparing them, as fitted for ven-
 geance by their criminal indulgences, to
 beasts that were fattened up for the slaughter.
 To save us as Christians from all corruptions
 of this kind, was one principal reason of the
 death and sufferings of our blessed Lord, *who*
gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver
us from this present evil world, according to the
will of God even our Father § ; and the grace
 of God that hath appeared to us in and by him,
 teaches us to deny all ungodliness and worldly
 lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in
 the present evil world ||. The great principle

* Luke xii. 19, 20. † Colos. iii. 6. ‡ James v. 5.
 § Gal. i. 4. || Tit. ii. 11, 12.

Serm. 3. *Voluptuousness destructive of real Piety:* 55

that should animate and influence the disciples of Christ is, that of faith; a steady belief of and regard to the invisible God and a future judgment and world and recompence. *We live by faith and not by sight, we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen* *, for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal †; and accordingly we are exhorted to seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God, and to set our affections on things above, and not on things on the earth; and to have our conversation in Heaven, and to have respect to the recompence of reward ‡; precepts which are absolutely irreconcilable with an habitual fondness for, and constant pursuit of sensual pleasure. Indeed almost the whole of Christianity is directly and on purpose calculated, to recover men from the low pursuits and the criminal indulgences of the present life, to exalt their affections, and terminate them on superior objects, to prepare them for and secure them the possession of pleasures and satisfactions of a quite different kind, from the animal and brutal, and such as depend merely on imagination, and a disordered and perverted judgment. So that the thorough sensualist can never be a real Christian; his disposition is altogether the reverse of the spirit of the gospel, and his life influenced by quite other principles, and a constant pursuit of quite

* 2 Cor. v. 7. † iv. 18. ‡ Colos. iii. 1, 2

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* 2 Cor. v. 7. † iv. 18. ‡ Colos. iii. 1, 2

different objects, than those recommended by the revelation of our blessed Saviour. Indeed there is nothing so unfriendly to, and destructive of the great end and design of all true religion, as may be made appear by many considerations.

1. Consider the *bad influence* which the *voluptuary* disposition hath on all kind of *good principles* whatsoever, and how impossible it is that they should ever prosper in, and have any firm possession of the minds of those, who are under the power and dominion of it. If we attend to *facts*, what are, generally speaking, your men of pleasure and gaiety, whose lives are one perpetual round of diversion and sensuality; what are they but poor, empty, thoughtless, unprincipled wretches, who know nothing of truth, who are incapable of all just reasoning upon the most important subjects, who cannot see the force of the clearest evidence, nor draw the proper inferences and conclusions from the most unquestionable premises; who will scarce allow the being of a God, and are sometimes impious and fools enough to ridicule it; who, as far as they can, have banished his inspection and providence out of the world, laugh at the thoughts of a future account, and censure all the doctrines and great duties of religion as precarious and irrational, and having no other foundation but superstition and credulity. As to Christianity, they seem to be in general agreed, that 'tis nothing but a mixture of imposture and priestcraft; and I believe

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believe all who rightly understand the nature of it will so far agree with them, that 'tis a religion perfectly unsuitable to them, and that they have no other way left to make themselves tolerably easy in the courses they are determined to pursue, but to discard and renounce it. For

1. It is impossible in the nature of the thing, but that they must be *prejudiced* in their own minds against all the *genuine principles of true religion*, and cherish a secret displeasure and aversion to them. *They cannot receive the love of the truth that they may be saved by it.* For there is nothing so opposite as these principles and their practice, and the maxims they lay down for the regulation of their own conduct. Inclination and passion, bodily instinct and appetite are with them the great rules of conduct. What pleases their eye, gratifies their vanity, feeds their luxury, indulges their pride, contributes to their mirth, and ministers to their sensual gratifications, these are the things that possess their hearts, that constitute their happiness, and which they imagine essentially necessary to the true relish and enjoyment of life. Separate them from these, and you take away from them the very sources of felicity; they are uneasy, discontented and restless, they know not how to possess themselves, every hour of life is tedious, every other engagement is a burthen. They languish, they pine, they almost die for want of their accustomed gratifications, and 'till they are restored to those amusements, follies and indul-

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indulgences, which alone have power to entertain and please them. Now what relish can men of this complexion have for religious principles, which in the very nature of them tend to check the passions, to correct the strong tendencies of our animal nature, to curb and restrain all the lower inclinations and appetites of our frame, to render us suspicious as to the final consequences of a sensual conduct, and to fill us with anxiety and fear, as the fruit of forbidden, immoderate indulgences? Religious principles call men to converse with quite different objects, and point out to them a course of life quite contrary to what sensualists are fond of. They expressly condemn their way as folly, and hold up to their view the most aggravated and substantial ruin, from the displeasure of the almighty being, and the punishments of a future state, as the sure recompence of a life of habitual, bodily, and criminal pleasure. How then is it possible that they can approve, or think favourably of, or have any esteem or regard for principles that are perpetually thwarting all their favourite inclinations, checking those appetites to which they want to give the freest indulgence, and constantly raising scruples and jealousies, and fears about things, as to which they would be entirely and absolutely at liberty? Who loves to be made perpetually uneasy? Who can endure a monitor that is perpetually controuling and chiding him? Who can be fond of, or have any prevailing affection for companions

panions, that are always reproaching and censuring of him? Who will cherish in his own breast, reflections that are every day preying on his heart and conscience, and that will never suffer him to enjoy himself, and gratify his desires in peace, whenever he attends to them? On these accounts, religious principles cannot but appear to men of pleasure in the most disadvantageous and unfavourable view. They have an interest with which they can never be reconciled. They must be enemies to them in inclination, and ever look upon them with an inward aversion and hatred.

2. Hence it becomes almost impossible, that they can ever * *examine* them with that *care and impartiality*, which are necessary to form a proper judgment concerning them, and to enable them to discern the real evidence and proof attending them. The truth is †, men of this cast seldom search with any desire of being convinced at all, or finding out such evidence as would carry conviction with it. They had much rather never be convinced, and therefore their inquiries relate only to the difficulties of religion. They are always in quest after objections, some appearance of contradiction, somewhat that may furnish them with matter of ridicule; in a word, they are not solicitous to understand the foundation of those truths that

* — Male verum examinat omnis. Corruptus Index. Hor. Sat. 1. 2. Sat. 2.

† Acclinis falsis animus meliora recusat. Hor. ibid.

displease them, but to provide themselves with such specious arguments against them, as may at least put them out of all pain upon account of them. And as the prejudices and vices of men will easily furnish them with topicks of this nature, a superficial enquiry is best for this purpose, and that cursory careless view of things will be sufficient to help on the ends of scepticism in religion, which will by no means serve to form a clear and impartial judgment as to the great principles of it. For

Though religious truths have the most certain foundation to support them, and may be made appear, to minds rightly disposed, with the fullest conviction, both as to their certainty and importance; yet they are of that nature as to deserve and require very serious consideration, to be maturely weighed, and with a mind free from all prejudice and bias, otherwise the evidence, however near to us, and sufficient in its own nature, will escape our observation, or at least not enter into our minds with that clear light and force, as to carry a suitable conviction. If the passions and appetites be allowed any share in the decision, the judgment cannot fail so far to be mistaken and false, the least objections against truth will heighten into very formidable difficulties, and gradually arise to unanswerable arguments against the most sacred principles, and the best and most satisfying solutions will be received with great indifference, and treated as unsatisfactory and deficient

cient. If the enquiry into them be slight and superficial, and men choose to take the representations of such as have themselves contracted an incurable dislike and aversion to them, instead of being at the pains of honestly examining for themselves; it is no wonder, that when truth is misrepresented to them either by being set up to scorn in a *ridiculous* dress, as absurd and contrary to all reason; or shewn them in a very *forbidding* and *frightful* view, as creating groundless terrors, as inconsistent with liberty, and destructive of the pleasures and enjoyments of life; or reproached and reviled as a wicked thing, the creature of imposture, and the invention of crafty and designing men, to subdue the world, and keep others in the state of dependence on themselves; I say, 'tis no wonder, that truth under these disguises should be treated with contempt, or abhorrence by those, that have never had time or inclination, to give it any serious examination themselves, and who are too much interested against it to hear with patience a different account of it from others, and too conceited of their own knowledge and ability, to think they need any farther information and instruction. Now on all these accounts men of pleasure seem to be the most incompetent judges of truth, and the least likely ever clearly to discern it. For it is a thing so foreign to, of so quite a different nature from a pleasureable sensual life, that 'tis impossible they can have any inclination to those severer studies,

or

or the labours of reflection and enquiry, which are necessary to understand it. The continually hurry of diversion, and their constant pursuit of what amuses and gratifies them, employs their whole time, so that they have no leisure for serious thought, no spare hours of life to enter into any considerations becoming the dignity of human nature, and worthy the character of reasonable beings; so that nothing is more evident, than that their contempt of and rejecting the principles of religion is not the effect of mature deliberation, impartial enquiry, solid judgment and superior understanding.

And indeed no one can imagine this, who considers what sort of persons they are, who now appear amongst us, to shew the greatest disregard and most sovereign contempt for all the great and essential articles of natural and revealed religion. They are generally speaking, *young persons*, just slipped into the character of men, educated either in all the hurries of secular business, or amidst all the negligences, corruptions, luxuries and bad examples of riches and plenty, who have scarce ever conversed with men of learning, knowledge and principle, who have read little, and thought less, who can never be supposed to have formed any mature judgment, nor indeed ever had the proper time and opportunity for entering seriously into religious subjects, and who appear to be really incapable of reasoning upon them, and almost wholly ignorant of the nature of them. All
they

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they know is what they have been told by some of their elder brethren in infidelity, who began the world just in the same circumstances with themselves ; or what they have gathered from a few modern writings, in which the doctrines of religion have been wickedly blasphemed, or ridiculed, or impudently condemned, as irrational, absurd, and contradictory, or through weakness misrepresented and perverted. And all they have, many of them, learnt is, an air of assurance and importance, great intrepidity in profaneness, and the art of being profligate and vile, without fear of God, or remorse of conscience. These are infidels at second hand, upon the foundation of credulity and implicit faith ; and their arguments to defend themselves are a seasonable jest, a little borrowed ridicule, a smart invective, or a few properly placed names of reproach on those who profess to believe the principles of religion, and especially on those whose character and office 'tis to teach, and instruct others in the knowledge of them. The cry of *enthusiasm, imposture, faith, credulity, bigotry, superstition, priestcraft*, and the like *magick* terms, doth wonders with them, disarms reason of all her power, destroys the force of demonstration, dispossesses the evil spirit of religion, transforms piety into a mere creature of imagination, turns Christianity into a fable, and all the powers of the world to come into a dream, a vision, a romance. Would to God all that I have said in this description was a mere imagination

gination, and that there was no room for this complaint or reproach. But the thing is fact, it appears uppermost in their conversation, and is the only strength of the infidelity of many, who have neither years nor knowledge, nor acquaintances enough with men or books, to render them competent masters of the things, as to which they pertly decide, and pass the most severe and positive judgment. As the first part of their life hath been spent in learning the affairs of trade and commerce, so they have no sooner become their own masters, but they have chosen the gay, the pleasurable part, and fallen into acquaintances, and contracted friendships with those, who have led them into all the fashionable follies and extravagances of the times; whereby it hath been absolutely out of their power to cultivate their minds, to improve their understandings, or make any considerable progress in wisdom and true knowledge. So that wherever religion be in its own nature, 'tis impossible they should know much of it, either of the real and main difficulties, or the force and sufficiency of the evidences that attend it.

3. Hence this immoderate love of pleasure, this sensual disposition is the natural *preparative* for *downright infidelity*, and generally ends in it. *They believe not the truth, because they take pleasure in unrighteousness.* Inclination leads them to hope there is no God, and that all the principles of religion may be false. Their passion for pleasure will not endure any curb
or

or restraint, and makes them determined enemies to truth and righteousness; puts them upon using violence to all the soberest dictates of conscience, renders them incapable of all serious consideration and reflection, hardens their minds against all possible convictions, creates an utter inattention to every kind of evidence, and makes them the property of wretches, who take a devilish pleasure in corrupting their principles and morals, and bringing them to be as profane and wicked and profligate as themselves. *This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world. But men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.* And let it be observed as a standing mark of infamy, and eternal reproach upon this voluptuary temper and course, that it is, as will be shewn, absolutely inconsistent with all the valuable interests of the present life; so that there is *one* path to *infidelity and ruin*, and the same way that leads to impiety and contempt of principle, carries them on, however smoothly, yet infallibly, to all the worst distresses and miseries of human nature. But

4. If through the strong and clear evidence with which the great truths of religion are attended, men cannot thoroughly get rid of their principles, so as entirely to throw off the belief of them, and renounce them as wholly precarious and absurd; yet the habitual love of pleasure will render them *incapable of attending* to them; so that they will almost absolutely lose sight of them, and think of

them to as little purpose, as though they intirely disbelieved them. Downright infidelity is a length that even all bad men neither profess nor dare to go; they have some general secret persuasion, that there is some truth in religion, and there is generally some season or other in their life, some interval of cool and sober reflection, when their apprehension and conviction of the reality of religious truths is more affecting and lively. And notwithstanding their habitual wickedness, and living as though they had wholly discarded all manner of principles, yet they would reckon themselves extreamly injured, should they be reproached as unbelievers, and warmly resent and stily deny the charge of impiety and atheism. Allow them to be believers. Let them keep possession of their principles, yet this must be granted, that if they have them, 'tis *as though they had them not*; if they are believers they are extreamly thoughtless ones, and seldom if ever, but when some kind of unavoidable necessity or other forces them, reflect on what they believe, or consider the proper influence and tendency of it. And indeed how should they? 'Tis impossible the mind should be attentive to two absolutely contrary subjects at once, or equally divided and seriously fixed at the same time on Heaven and earth, religion and pleasure, spiritual and sensible objects, the improvement of the mind, and the gratification of the bodily appetites and passions. *They that are after the flesh will mind the things of the flesh, and they that are after the*
spirit

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spirit will mind the things of the spirit †. The prevailing disposition will suitably employ the thoughts, and in a great measure exclude all other considerations that are dissimilar to, and tend to interrupt and check the general bias. What therefore signify principles? The sensualist's head is engrossed by thoughts of a quite foreign nature, and as to them he hath laid them aside as useless lumber, of no signification and value; as things with which he hath no concern, or much too dull to be admitted to any share of his conversation and friendship. Gayer scenes attract his eye, and more sprightly images are perpetually fluttering before his imagination, that will not give him leisure to receive any other impressions, or admit such considerations, as have a tendency to check the pleasing prospects, and cool the warm desires of his heart. And therefore,

5. The consequence of this will certainly be, that whatever his *principles* are, they will have *no influence* on him, or power suitably to affect him; whereby he will be just the same man, as to his moral temper and conduct, as though he had intirely discharged them, and given them up as altogether groundless. For if principles, though ever so good, are kept constantly out of sight, they must be as constantly disregarded, and the effect of such an habitual neglect and contempt of them must be an utter incapacity in them to excite an-

† Rom. viii. 5.

swerable dispositions, and to produce any valuable and worthy fruits. Nothing can operate where it is not, and therefore absent principles must, in the nature of the thing, be wholly ineffectual; and you will always find it true, that inconsiderate and thoughtless men, or, which is the same thing, men that never think of any thing but their pleasures and sensual gratifications, are ever irreligious and bad men. Principles influence the mind, not by any natural or physical force, or necessarily as pleasure or pain affect the body, and make men attentive to them whether they will or no; but in a quite different manner, and for their agency depend on the permission of the will, the consent of the heart, and the leave of the governing inclinations and passions. They must be placed before the mind in the clearest view, and held up to constant inspection and attention. They must be discerned in their full evidence and certainty, in all their connections and consequences, and in their unspeakable and infinite importance to us. They must be again and again impressed on the heart and conscience by the most fixed and frequent consideration, and they should be strengthened and quickened and warmed by the most serious prayers unto God, that he would enable us to preserve a lively sense of them in our minds, and subject ourselves intirely to the sacred guidance of them. Whatever passions or affections tend to weaken our regard to them, or suppress their natural influence, should with the utmost

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most caution be guarded against, and nothing allowed in us that can offer the least violence or injury to it. With principles thus cultivated, thus diligently tended and nourished, we shall *neither be barren nor unfruitful in our knowledge.* They will prosper and thrive in the mind that thus receives them, and discover their genuine worth and powerful influence in all the substantial fruits of real piety and goodness. But can such an improvement and management of principles ever be expected from a man of pleasure? His attention is led off to a thousand different objects. He studiously avoids and flies from all reflections of this kind. He is uneasy whenever by chance they steal or force themselves into his mind, and ever thinks their visits unseasonable and impertinent. He studies his face more than his heart, his glass oftener than his creed, the fashion, the colour, the garnish of his dress, more exactly than the habit of his mind, the call of his passions rather than the dictate of his conscience, what pleases and regales instead of what may profit him, what may keep up the elegance, the splendor, and luxury of life, instead of what may add to the perfection, rectitude and dignity of his rational being; in a word, how he may *kill the time* by seasonable successions of amusements, follies, and vices, rather than how he may improve it in fixing right sentiments of truth in his mind, and securing the proper influence of them over his conduct. So that should such a one profess to believe the

best principles, and to be ever so firmly persuaded of them, his belief must be absolutely ineffectual and dead, and wholly useless as to all the purposes of true religion and virtue. But

6. In consequence of this disbelief of, inattention to, and inefficacy of principle, which is the constant attendant of this immoderate love of pleasure, there will be farther *an utter want of that rational regard to God*, of all those *right affections and dispositions towards him*, in which the very essence of true piety consists, and without which all external services whatsoever will be of no value in the nature of things, or in the estimation of God. This *awful sense of Deity* cannot possibly be duly cultivated and rightly cherished, unless we are at proper seasons abstracted from every thing of a sensual nature, divorced from all the pleasing amusements of life, and wholly attentive to the most grave and sober, and serious reflections. The general belief of the being, perfections, and providence of God, is of itself of but little consequence in religion, and unless actually and habitually present to the mind, can never excite that reverential fear, that warm affection, that strong gratitude, that chearful trust, that firm confidence, that fixed delight in, that desire to please, and that ambition to be accepted of God, which are all indispensable ingredients of a rational piety. Faith in him is indeed the root of all other graces; but unless the ground in which 'tis planted be duly prepared, cleansed from every

every thing offensive, and the root itself in it carefully cherished by a due proportion both of moisture and warmth, 'tis impossible it can live, send forth fresh fibres, open into bloom, or bring forth any of its fruits to maturity and perfection. Fixed and frequent consideration on the perfections and character of God, is one of the most effectual means that carries nourishment to this sacred principle, enlivens, quickens, and renders it vigorous and active, conveys its influence to the several affections and passions, and thus exalts them above their natural state, and transforms them into the more excellent and worthy dispositions of genuine piety. But what room for reflections of this kind in one, that hath no sort of relish but for sensual pleasure, and resigns himself entirely to the possession of it? How can he be attentive to the considerations of Deity, how can *God dwell in him*, and fill his mind, and employ his powers, when the whole current of his thoughts is drawn into a quite different channel, and directed into a course that terminates at the utmost distance from him? But unless we thus set God continually before us, and solemnly introduce him into our souls, in all the substantial and affecting glories of his being, what possible sentiments of piety can arise in our breasts, or what one right affection can we exercise towards this most excellent and adorable object? What possible veneration and reverence can there be in us for his majesty, if a thousand gaudy

images are erected in our souls, which we are continually admiring and adoring? What room can there be for the love of God, or for complacency and delight in him, if we are professed votaries of *Mammon*, *Belial*, and other the foul idols that vice and vanity have erected in opposition to him? How can we exercise that humble trust and chearful hope in his power and goodness, which are essential to the character of a religious man, if sensual gratifications constantly banish from our minds all thoughts of those divine perfections, which alone can support the exercise of those graces? What bias can there be in the soul towards God, what tendency to rest in him, as its portion and exceeding great reward, whose affections bind it down to earthly objects, and entirely estrange and separate it from its great original? Supposing the objects on which men thus immoderately set their hearts were in themselves lawful, and the pleasures that engrossed them could not be said in their own nature to be criminal, yet 'tis impossible that truly religious sentiments and dispositions of real piety could ever prosper in such a state of mind, because the affections can never center with a *superior force* on two directly contrary objects; no, nor embrace them with an equal ardency and warmth. All fixed dispositions and prevalent habits in favour of the lower pleasures, that are relative only to the body and the present world, do necessarily weaken and retard the flow of the passions towards invisible and spiritual things; so that in an exact

exact and unalterable proportion as our affections tend to created and corporeal good, they will withdraw themselves from and grow cool towards him, who as the supream perfection and excellency deserves our best and highest regards. What then shall we say to the pleasures of sin, and to the habits that men contract of criminal gratifications? If the love of pleasures, in their nature innocent, may gain such an ascendancy in us, as almost to supplant all right affections towards God, how is it possible that these affections should ever subsist in the midst of passions directly and unalterably sinful, or flourish in minds that are enslaved by habits of wickedness and vice? In the former case, the root of faith is impoverished and starved, by drawing from it all the kindly juices and nourishment that should invigorate and supply it; in the latter case, it is really killed by those poisonous and destructive weeds, which suffer no seeds of piety whatsoever to live around them. And indeed the love of pleasures, directly sinful, eradicates the awes of God, defaces all impressions on the mind arising from the sense of deity, wholly suppresses all tenderness of conscience, steels the heart against the terrors of the divine anger, conceals from the view every pleasing prospect of God, and creates a dreadful incapacity for loving and delighting in him; stifles every tendency to ingenuous gratitude, and is absolutely inconsistent with the exercise of it; subverts the very foundation of hope and trust in God,

God, takes of every bias of the soul tending to him as its proper happiness ; and, in a word, intirely indisposes and disables it for all acquaintance with God, and extinguishes those sacred affections towards him, in which the life and power of real religion and godliness consist. But farther,

7. Another bad effect of this voluptuary and sensual disposition, and which shews how inconsistent it is with the life and prosperity of true religion, is : Its *bad influence* in reference to all the *external expressions, -means and instruments of real piety*, by which the inward principles are discovered, and the religious spirit and temper is preserved, cultivated and improved. All inward dispositions have natural and proper methods of manifesting themselves, visible fruits that indicate of what nature they are, as certainly as the tree is known by what it produces ; and there are suitable means for cultivating dispositions and habits of a moral and religious nature, without which they will not thrive, nor even become superior in their influence to the impulses of our animal affections and passions. These, as natural to us, are inseparable from us, and need nothing of art, endeavour, or study to strengthen them. 'Tis the business of a wise and good man's life to subdue, restrain and regulate them. The other, the sentiments and habits of true piety and goodness may be truly said to be adventitious ; that do not, like the other, spring up out of the soil of unimproved nature,

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ture, but are the fruits of cultivation, and that need therefore perpetual care, watchfulness and industry to maintain their life, their vigour and their beauty. 'Tis I believe scarce possible to imagine, how inward sentiments and habits of piety can discover themselves, by external correspondent actions, otherwise than by fixed meditations on God, solemn adoration of his infinite perfections and majesty, suitable praises and thanksgivings for his benefits, fervent supplication and prayer for his continued protection and favour, care to imitate him, and by a chearful attendance on all those institutions which are proper in their nature, and appointed by God, to keep up the life and spirit of true devotion and piety. These things are both genuine expressions of an inward reverence and esteem for God, and help to confirm them; and I apprehend that an internal principle of true religion and godliness will shew and exert itself in fruits of this kind, as naturally and invariably, as every seed arises into its distinguishing production, and can be expressed by no other signs and evidences whatsoever.

1. But how *heartless* and *indisposed* to all exercises and services of this nature, must the *man of pleasure* naturally be? How is it possible he should so far abstract himself from the world, and all the concerns of it, as is necessary to his having any relish and taste for employments of this kind, who hath wholly accustomed himself to converse with sensible objects only? If he be taken up with the
impertinences

impertinences and follies of life, which cannot be termed directly and in their nature criminal; if the gay, the polite, the fashionable world is his great study and care, and his thoughts habitually employed on the splendid trifles and shewy amusements, to which the noble, the great, the rich in general attend, for which alone they almost think themselves made, and for a more liberal indulgence in which they imagine their titles, their honours and their fortunes to be their peculiar privilege; if, I say, the inclination to these impertinences of life becomes the prevailing passion, and the fancy and imagination be fully and constantly possessed with them, the effect must be a settled disinclination and inability to all the exercises of godliness. For sober reasoning and thought upon abstracted subjects and invisible objects, can never employ the head that is crowded with material and sensible images; and if the world hath always free admission into the heart, God must necessarily be excluded from it. Converse with him will be a difficult task. 'Tis an exercise so foreign to what the sensualist hath habituated himself, that he will neither know how to set about it, or by what means to carry it on. The faculty is obtained by experience and use, and can be improved only by frequency and application. Whenever he attempts any thing of this nature, 'tis impossible his heart can be fixed, his thoughts coherent, his reasonings connected, or his apprehensions clear; and therefore as impossible
that

that his affections can be warmed, or any such pleasure experienced in it, as is necessary to reconcile him to the work and render it an entertainment to him. The effect of which must be a growing reluctance to such engagements, the becoming weary of them, the looking on them as an unpleasing task and burthen, the framing to our minds excuses and apologies for the neglecting of them, the gladly laying hold of every opportunity that offers to omit them ; 'till by frequent omissions, the uneasiness arising from such omissions gradually cease, whereby they become more and more frequent, and at last, which is frequently the case, they are entirely thrown up, without any remaining remorse of conscience on account of it.

2. Yea, sometimes this sensual, pleasureable disposition so far prevails over and deceives men, as that they are at last taught to *defend themselves in such omissions* by specious reasonings, and appearances of argument. If they are pressed to that solemn converse with God, which is implied in prayer to him, and in the sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise, they will tell us ; “ that God knows our wants
“ without our telling him, that he is immu-
“ table, and our prayers cannot change him,
“ that he doth not want our praises, and
“ can receive no benefit by them, and that
“ morality and a virtuous life, are the best
“ recompence we can make for all the di-
“ vine benefits ;” as if we were not to *ac-*
knowledge our dependence on God because he
knows

knows we are dependent; or as if God could not be immutable if, according to his own immutable perfection, he varied the external methods of his providence, and vouchsafed his favours according to the moral circumstances of his creatures; or as if God's not wanting any thing from us could make any alteration in our relation and duty to him, who want every thing from him; or morality could be compleat if men forget their obligation to God; or the practice of moral virtue to men could excuse us from a right disposition and conduct towards him. Objections of this kind are not founded on *reason*, but spring out of *disinclination* and prejudice to these great duties and expressions of piety, which if regularly attended to, would check that inclination to pleasure they are resolved to cherish, and indulge freely. In like manner, the attendance on all the publick services of the house of God, they look on as quite unnecessary, and a periodical worship they imagine hath nothing to support it. They are exceeding wise themselves, and know as much as the preacher can tell them. Or they can read a good book at home, or meditate abroad with equal devotion as in the church. Every day is alike proper for religion, and they know not why they should be more religious one day than another; with other objections of like force. But a man need not be very acute to see through the fallacy of these arguments. If they are so very *knowing*, do they never need
to

to be *put in mind* of what they know? Do not men of pleasure need it almost above all other men? Can *publick worship* be supported without *fixed times* and seasons, and is not periodick worship therefore as necessary as any publick worship at all? Is devotion that is *altogether private* equally conducive to the publick good as *social*? Is not the publick expression of reverence for God a publick testimony in favour of religion, and therefore a very great encouragement to it, and one method of putting some check to national impiety and vice? Is not a nation, as such, one political body and person, that hath its blessings to ask of God, and is to be thankful for the receipt of them; and therefore why are not expressions of piety as necessary and proper from the publick person as from individuals? Supposing *some few* could gain as much benefit by a good book at home as by publick instruction, can this be said of *all*, or the major part? Is there not therefore somewhat due from every one by way of example to the publick; doth it not answer a good end to lead and invite and encourage others to attend on those publick services, which are necessary to their instruction, and to preserve alive in them any sense of God, any regard to principle and the practice of true virtue? And supposing for once, that there are some *peculiar advantages* in publick worship, that are to be expected no other ways, supposing it to be an *institution of God*, and that his presence and blessing may reasonably be hoped for

So Voluptuousness destructive of real Piety. Sermon 3.

for in the use of it ; what will all these pretended arguments against it prove ? What, that social worship is an impertinent and unnecessary thing ? Or that God hath done wrong to appoint or expect it ? Or rather, that men themselves are in an extream bad disposition, who are thus entirely disaffected to it, and strive to impose on themselves, and by fallacious arguments to justify a conduct, that I am persuaded may be proved contrary to the most certain principles of natural and revealed religion.

From these sort of arguments, which are the main pleas of your men of liberty and pleasure, 'tis evident that the great thing they want and aim at, is, wholly to banish all expressions of regard to and reverence for God and his providence, both out of publick and private life. If prayer and thanksgiving to God be unnecessary for the reasons they urge, the devotions of the closet, and the best part of those of the church must absolutely cease at once, and in truth almost every thing of religious worship, God, the object of it, and every thing relative to him be wholly discarded from amongst mankind. And in consequence of this, all instruction must be thrown by, or become an exceeding poor, lifeless, and impertinent thing ; for if men are not to be taught their duty to God, nor led into the veneration of his majesty, nor morality to be urged on them by the authority and awes of God, every thing else that can be taught them will be of little consequence to morality ;

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rality ; which without this will want the best and surest motives to support and encourage the practice of it.

3. Hence 'tis no wonder, that under the influence of such a disposition, they should never themselves appear in an assembly for religious worship, and take as much care to keep out of a church, as they do out of a charnel house or sepulchre. Nothing that is regularly transacted there can be the least entertainment to them. They are barbarians as to the very language made use of in the house of God, and cannot conceive the meaning of the terms with which devotion cloaths itself. Pray they cannot. They have neither the knowledge nor the heart to do it. The blessings that good men ask are to them undesirable, and many of them such as they are determined never to accept at the hands of God. The exercise of gratitude to God they are strangers to, know not whether or no they are indebted to him for those external blessings in which they place their happiness ; and as to others, they neither have them, nor wish to have them, and therefore owe nothing upon account of them, and thus in their own imagination have as little reason, as in reality inclination to be thankful. And therefore the offering praises to God must, upon their principles, appear an unnecessary and impertinent superstition. As to all publick instruction, they hold it in the most sovereign contempt. A discourse concerning religion is enthusiasm and cant. Morality is a
VOL. III. G dry,

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dry, insipid subject, of which they have no relish. Their ears are too delicate to hear any thing about a future judgment and the punishments of a life to come, and they would be apt to charge the preacher with want of decency and politeness, should he, if they were accidentally present, grate their ears with such harsh and unpleasing sounds. To reproach them for their sins would be rudeness. To press them to repentance, impertinence. To threaten them with divine vengeance, nothing short of presumption and insolence : And therefore to avoid all uneasiness on these accounts, they seldom come near the places where these disagreeable subjects are made mention of. And for this reason the weekly day of worship is perverted by them into quite a different use and purpose from its original intention, either wasted in sleep and sloth and indolence at home, or partly loitered away in houses of resort, kept open for the men that have nothing to do with Almighty God, and think their own souls of too little worth to deserve any care to save them ; or partly trifled away in the impertinences of dress and visit ; or prostituted in private diversions, games, and entertainments, that in the manner they practice them are scarce lawful on any day ; or abused in adjusting and settling their worldly affairs and accounts, because they have no thoughts, or views, or hopes as to a future state. In a word, as 'tis a day, in which no publick diversions are as yet authorised, I know not what

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what time may produce, 'tis an almost lost day to them, which they scarce know how to fill up, which lies tediously upon their hands, and on which they are glad of any thing, except the exercises proper to the day, to pass away the time, and keep themselves from the plague of reflection, and the hated drudgery of worshipping God.

4. Or if through custom, or some remaining tenderness of conscience, they cannot wholly abstain from the house of God, how can it be that they should receive any *real benefit* from the services of it? For

1. They are *incapable of attending to them*. Frequently the foregoing evening is spent by them in such entertainments, as have filled their minds with ideas but little favourable to the spirit of piety, and in such company and diversions, as no one ever imagined would contribute any thing to the life and fervour of true devotion; amidst scenes, the impressions of which are not easily forgotten, and which cannot but frequently crowd in upon them in those solemnities, where men should be entirely abstracted from all the vanities of life, and wholly intent upon much more excellent and interesting objects; so that their minds are absent, and they scarce bear any part in the services at which they are present; on which account they deserve a share in that character which God hath so severely threatened: *This people draws near me with their mouth, and with their lips do they honour*

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me, but have removed their heart far from me †.
If through fullness, or the fatigue of diversion, they are not oppressed with drowsiness, and heavy with sleep, the remembrance of past entertainments takes up their minds, or future assignations and parties of pleasure warm their hopes, and are enjoyed by lively anticipation ; or the dress of the audience attracts their observation, so that Heaven hath no more of their eyes than their hearts ; or by secret whispers, and the indecency of laughter in the countenance, they betray an inward contempt for the services they should be engaged in, and too plainly discover that God is not in all their thoughts. In a word, their reflections are dissipated, their attention, if there be any, distracted, and their affections utterly senseless and unmoved ; so that they cannot unite their hearts to fear God, and if they offer him any thing, what must it but the *sacrifice of fools* ?

2. If they could attend to the services of the house of God, yet they could not bear any *heartly willing part in them*. How is it indeed possible, that they should cordially join in any of the solemnities of religious worship, when all of them tend to awaken and fix a disposition directly the reverse of what influences and governs them ? Can they with sincerity say Amen to prayers, that God would *create in them clean hearts, and*

† Isaiah xix. 13.

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renew right spirits within them, that he would save them from the vanities of life, and the delusions of pleasure, and enable them to *fix their affections on things that are above, and not on things that are on earth*? Will not habit and passion reluctant rather to such an assent? Will not such requests appear to them unnecessary, and favouring of superstition, sourness, and precision? Or will they not through partiality and self deceit forget their own immediate concern in prayers of this nature, and imagine, that however reasonable they are in themselves, they do not affect their character and conduct, as seeing nothing criminal in themselves, and being unwilling to believe that what they love is inconsistent with religion, or offensive to God? If such subjects are insisted on, in the course of publick instruction, as tend to censure their conduct, and represent the folly and danger of it; either they are offended with the preacher as using indecent liberties, and levelling his discourses immediately against them, meddling with things quite out of his sphere; or treat him with contempt, as inveighing against pleasures he is not able to come at, and finding fault with innocent gratifications, in which through interest, or moroseness, or needless singularity he refuses to partake; or fortify themselves against all that he can say to them, by resolving immediately to forget it, or by sheltering themselves in some saving opinions, that may give hopes of final mercy without repentance and reformation.

3. If on these accounts persons are not at last prevailed on wholly to absent themselves from the solemnities of worship, yet they effectually *prevent* all manner of *good influence* and *serious impressions* on themselves in the use of them. Heedless, inattentive prayers can never affect the mind, nor derive any supplies of grace from God. They are mere useless breath, blown away long before they reach his throne ; or if they find their way thither, appear only as arguments of the insincerity and hypocrisy of the offerer ; so that as they do not proceed from, so they leave no traces of a serious spirit behind them, nor contribute any thing to fix the disposition of piety by their acceptance and prevalence with Almighty God. In themselves they are lighter than vanity, and in his account they are foolishness and an abomination. Nor will the instructions of religion find their way into the conscience, quicken the active powers, be attended with success, or conduce to the purposes of real religion, however pertinent and clear they may be in themselves, and with whatever warmth and seriousness they may be enforced, if the first attention to them be negligent, or the after remembrance of them be entirely excluded. What signifies preaching, if the minds of the hearers be not engaged ; or what would even an Apostle be, as to any good effect, better than sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal, if the ear was entirely disaffected to the musick of his instruction, or if that was heard through a medium

dium that would render it indistinct or grating? It is confessed, that the preaching of the gospel is too frequently wholly ineffectual, and the number of converts it makes to religion and virtue comparatively but small. And there are many causes that contribute to this evil. But is not the principal one frequently in the indisposition of the hearer? Doth he come with that temper which is necessary to his profiting? Doth he attend to publick instruction as an institution appointed by God for his improvement in the life of faith and piety? Doth he ruminate on what he hears, and digest it by serious reflection, and a faithful application of what he hears to his own condition and character? If he receives at any time any good impressions or right convictions, doth he cherish them and fix them by proper consideration? If the love of pleasure be uppermost in the heart, this can never be done. Impressions of this kind, in a sensual disposition, cannot be permanent. The prevailing habit will soon efface them, and when neglected they will instantly die.

Our blessed Saviour hath well compared the truths of his religion to *good seed*, and the different sort of hearers to different kinds of ground, on which the seed falls. *Formal and heedless hearers* he likens to the *way side* and *the seed falling on it*, because as such seed never enters the ground, so the doctrines of religion never enter into the understandings and hearts of such persons; *the wicked one catches*

away the word, as the fowls of the air do the seed scattered on the high road. Other hearers are compared to *ground full of thorns* on which the seed is sown, which indeed may come up, but cannot thrive or live long, because kept down and destroyed by the foulness of the ground on which it fell; representing those who having heard his word, *go forth and are choaked with cares and riches, and the pleasures of this life, and so bring forth no fruit to perfection* *. Both the seed must be good, and the soil proper and well cleansed, or the hopes of a considerable harvest must be disappointed. Hence the inefficacy of the Christian doctrine, and the instructions of the house of God, on such large numbers who wear the Christian name, may be most certainly accounted for, without supposing any defect in the doctrine itself, or internal inaptitude and impotency to promote the ends of religion and virtue. A love of moral truth and a firm belief of it, are the proper dispositions to receive the doctrines of Christ. It is this that makes the ground, the *heart good*. If it falls on any other soil, or meets with a contrary disposition, 'tis impossible it can live, take root, spring up with vigour into real and permanent good habits, or produce any valuable increase, any genuine fruits of righteousness in due proportion or abundance. Or if there be any natural goodness in the soil, any native ingenuity of mind, or origi-

* Luke viii. 14.

nal tendency to truth and righteousness, yet if through an habitual and criminal neglect, sensual affections have been suffered to prevail, and a long course of indulgence to appetite and inclination hath fixed and rivetted the love of pleasure, so that the mind is filled with lively images and strong desires, passionately fond, and eagerly bent to the pursuit and enjoyment of it; the natural goodness of the ground in such a case will be of no avail, whilst these thorns and briars, these noxious and destructive weeds are encouraged, and suffered to grow at liberty and unmolested. The best principles that can be offered to such a one's consideration can carry but little conviction, nor the warmest and wisest instructions, how well soever adapted to do good, make any deep or lasting impressions; because of the return and prevalence of stronger passions, that soon efface all weaker traces on the mind, or prevent it from receiving any in favour of Christian piety and goodness.

This is an effect that arises out of the very nature of things, and the narrow capacity of the human mind, which cannot retain, nor steadily view at once a multiplicity of objects, nor be equally impressed and affected at the same time by such as are of a quite different and contrary nature. As a stream can never run contrary to itself, so neither can the inclinations and passions; and therefore if they flow with their full strength to sensible appearances, the gratification of the appetites,
and

and those pomps and pleasures of the world, which are all the heaven and happiness that the generality desire; all other tendencies will be too feeble to resist the impetuous stream, and be easily borne down by the prevailing current. So that if we consider only the frame of our own being, and attend to the natural workings of those passions that are inserted into it; men of pleasure can reap no advantage from any of the services of the house of God, and the temper they bring with them into it will either render them absolutely stupid and insensible under every persuasive that revelation can offer to a religious life; or enervate and suppress every rising sentiment and disposition in favour of it, before it gains root and strength enough to bring forth fruit to maturity.

4. Or if we consider the institutions of publick worship as appointed for the *communication of the divine assistance and grace*, and as means of deriving from God any peculiar aids and supports, suitable to the special difficulties of a religious life, in which view I think all the instances both of private and publick devotion should be considered; what prospect or hope can men under the influence and power of a sensual disposition reasonably form of obtaining any such influences from the God of grace? Or what likelihood is there that impressions of this kind, if received, should be permanent and effectual. I know indeed what God can do in this respect if he pleases, and possibly some few instances

stances of extraordinary conversions may be produced, by sudden strong impressions on the mind that have been happily successful. But there is no reasoning from what God *may* do, to what *he will* do, nor from a few *extraordinary* cases to the *common* and ordinary course of his dealings with men. God can produce an harvest out of the ground by his almighty power without the husbandman's labour and care, if he saw fit to do it. But should the husbandman refuse to sow his ground in expectation of such a miraculous harvest, would any one wonder at his disappointment? What is it to men in such instances to consider what God can do, when the obvious thought that should possess them is, what God usually doth, and what he hath given them reason and encouragement to hope he will do. If the *good seed* be, like that scattered by *the way side*, that never falls into the ground, is suffered to make no impression at all upon the heart and conscience; where hath God promised to make it spring up? Or to prevent the evil one from catching it away? Or if it should strike root, yet if it falls into an heart possessed with the love of riches, and a prevailing fondness for sensual pleasures, hath God undertaken by an extraordinary power to prevent its being choaked up and wholly destroyed? God's grace is unquestionably *free*. But doth it therefore follow that God will give it where 'tis *neither asked*, nor desired, nor the means of obtaining it *rightly improved*? Or that he will bestow it on men
who,

who, by being immersed in pleasurable indulgences, are really incapable of receiving and gaining any advantage by it. Sensualists are of all others the most unlikely to receive grace from God, and to find a blessing from him in the institutions of worship, because, generally speaking, there is nothing in them on which religious impressions can fasten, no hold to be taken of their consciences, nor any room for the admission of principles to operate in their minds, nor any one of their affections but what is strongly engaged in favour of their pleasures, and deeply prepossessed in prejudice of every thing of a religious nature. And if you make your observations you will find, that few of this complexion and character, comparatively speaking, are ever recovered, either by extraordinary or ordinary means, to real piety and virtue ; because nothing renders the mind so incapable of and averse to those sentiments and dispositions, which are essential to the life and power of godliness, as a strengthened, confirmed habit of sensual indulgence. So that divine influences falling on such persons would be like the fruitful showers, or the warming beams of the sun falling on a rock, or the sand, or the surface of the sea, that make no kind of visible alteration in them, and cannot, in the nature of the thing, produce either verdure or fruitfulness. So that in every view men of pleasure preclude themselves from all the advantages that may be otherwise expected in the use of the several means and instruments of

Serm. 3. *Voluptuousness destructive of real Piety.* 93
of religion and virtue, and cherish within themselves a temper that renders all the provisions of the grace of God wholly ineffectual to recover them to a sense of their duty and a proper meetness for their highest and most durable happiness; and which therefore must be allowed to be a temper highly disserviceable to the cause and interest of serious piety and godliness. And this will farther appear if we consider,

IV. The bad influence which a prevailing love of pleasure hath upon mens families; and I am convinced that the consequence must unavoidably be an increasing disinclination to every thing of a religious nature, and at length an absolute want of all manner of concern and thought about it; and that nothing short of this can be expected, according to the ordinary course of things. But of this in the next discourse.

S E R M O N IV.

Voluptuousness destructive to Mens
Families and secular Interests.

2 TIMOTHY iii. 4.

Lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.

I N some preceding discourses I have described this temper, and proved it to be very criminal, and shewn its fatal influence in several important instances. To those I have named, I would now add,

IV. The *bad influence* which a prevailing love of pleasure hath upon *mens families*.

'Tis natural to think that if parents are so fond of pleasure, as to neglect the cultivation and improvement of their *own minds* in religious habits, principles and dispositions, they will be but little solicitous of instilling them into *their children*, and never think it worth while to excite in them a relish for what they have no taste of themselves; much less for that to which they have contracted a strong disinclination or real aversion. Frequently they have neither time nor ability to give their
children

children any rational information. They have a multitude of *important trifles* on their hands, that are of too great moment to be neglected for the sake of that part of education, which they don't think of any great consequence or necessity, and which, as they have been without, or at least got rid of, as to any abiding effects, they cannot be persuaded is any ways essential to the welfare and happiness of their families. Many of them indeed, have not so much as an idea of the common principles of religion, or if they have, hold them in the most sovereign contempt, and never think or speak of them but with derision; and therefore are so far from any desire or care to instil into their childrens minds any knowledge or reverence of these things, that they breed them up in the deepest ignorance of these, or with an hereditary aversion and enmity to them. Yea, too many, who have had themselves the advantage of a religious education, yet having lost almost all the good impressions of it, by entering into the acquaintances and practices of the fashionable and well bred, look upon themselves as under a kind of obligation to bring up their children according to the prevailing taste, and give them an education that we usually call a genteel and polite one. They are oftentimes at great expence for masters to instruct them, and begrudge nothing they can lay out to refine and accomplish them. But then piety, morality, and the principles necessary to support the practice of these are never considered as part of a polite

polite education, as real accomplishments of human nature, and necessary to shine and appear with advantage in the world. These kind of things are quite grown out of fashion and repute, and should any one venture to appear with accomplishments of this nature, amongst the gay and elegant part of mankind, they would look upon his dress as much out of all mode and character, as though he had cloathed himself with *the antiquated habit* of a century or two past. To polish the mind, to refine the manners, and to teach moral elegance of behaviour, is not the art nor turn of the present times. The artists and instructors now sought after, are not men that can teach wisdom, or inform the understanding, that will read lectures on the reverence due to deity, the government of the passions, the obligations of benevolence and justice, the rules of honour, publick spirit, the love of our country, the contempt of indolence and pleasure, the foundations of moral virtue, or on any subject that may render them blessings in private, and ornaments in publick life : No. But such as can instruct the feet to move, and give *a graceful air* to the body only ; such as can teach the fingers to play, and the voice to bear a part in any harmony but that which is employed in praising the universal Creator : Such as have an exquisite taste and skill in the science of fashion, great depth of judgment in forming their pupils into an external elegance of appearance, richness of fancy and invention in
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the ornaments of dress, the furniture of our houses, or the disposition of a table; such who can provide new entertainments for the publick, or nicely and exactly regulate and conduct them, or form others into the behaviour that may make them appear with advantage in them. Education in families of fortune, pleasure and gaiety is almost universally confined to these and the like particulars; and though I am far from censuring every thing of this nature, as criminal, or improper for persons of fortune or station, yea, though I think them in their measure truly ornamental, and such as ought not to be wholly omitted, where the rank of life requires it, and there is a due affluence of fortune to support it; yet when education is wholly imployed in these things, and all the care of parents is only to instruct their children in the nature and use of these *fashionable elegances*; every one must see that children must grow up wholly destitute of all better principles, and almost without so much as a distant tendency of mind to true religion and virtue.

Especially when there is not only a *want of due cultivation* and instruction, but the constant influence of *example*, leading them almost from their very infancy into a life of pleasure, indulgence and sensuality; whereby the natural inclination to these things is heightened, and grows into such a fixed and permanent habit, as to become almost incurable. Pleasure is in itself an artful enchantress, grateful to sense and inclination, and the earliest care

should be taken to check the tendency to it, and prevent an immoderate fondness for it. We need no incentives to pursue it, no examples to lead us into the love and indulgence of it. If nature be left to itself, to follow its own dictates, and gratify its own passions and affections, we shall find it prone enough to animal gratifications. All her original instincts and propensities are after these, long before the faculties of reason open, and judgment and conscience can have power to curb and restrain them. But if those who have the care of children never concern themselves to call the powers of reason into exercise, nor assist them in forming just sentiments of the valuable ends and true improvement of human life; but leave them merely to the instincts of appetite, and the government of their senses, and even educate them in the arts of vanity, initiate them into all the reigning follies and extravagances of the times they live in, and countenance and encourage in them the natural bent and disposition to these things, by their own practice and daily example; how is it possible in such a situation, that they should have any apprehension of principles, any understanding of moral excellency and worth, any relish for the entertainments of reason, or the least inclination to enter into the spirit of true religion, and practice the virtues that are essentially and inseparably connected with it?

There is nothing more boasted of in the present age, than *reason*. Its absolute sufficiency

ficiency is so magnified as to decry all the assistance of divine instruction and revelation. It is, it seems, of so divine and all perfect a nature, as to be fit for any thing, and capable of every thing. I am not at all disposed to run down reason, nor have so much malice in my heart as to defame it, in revenge for the blasphemies that others have thrown out upon divine revelation. It is unquestionably an excellent thing, exalts us into some resemblance with the first and greatest of beings, and is the foundation of every thing that is great and valuable in human nature. But do we rightly understand what is meant by reason?

Do we mean by it the rational *powers and faculties*? These unquestionably are sufficient for every valuable purpose of human life, because they are our only capacities for every rational act and duty, and nothing, in the nature of things, can be required of any man, which he hath not powers to enable him to know and do. But *how are they sufficient*? What without opening, *without cultivation and improvement*? How have those charming and admirable youths of the present age, who are the most perfect adepts in the philosophy of dress, fashion, politeness, and all the various arts of gay life, how I say have they gained their important knowledge? To what do they owe this their singular elegance of taste, and exactness of judgment? Is it mere nature, or the improvement of nature? Have they it by the mere unassisted use

of their own excellent reason, without being beholden to any human instruction, revelation, and example? Is it not the effect of critical observation, being bred up amidst the most improving patterns, conversing with masters, valets, powderers, and the like noble professors in these belles arts and sciences? Yea have not many of these hopeful and incomparable youths travelled for the skill they have into foreign countries, exposed themselves to many hazards by sea and land, endured the scorching heat and pinching cold, visited the courts of princes, and the palaces of the great and noble, and returned blessings to their native country, finished by travel, furnished with knowledge, and capable of dictating laws of good breeding, and settling every punctilio of a genteel behaviour and dress? Is it not owing to what they have learnt abroad, and the curious observations they have made on foreign men and manners, that they have so much skill in the air and attitude of the hat, the shape, the length and breadth of the bag, the trim, the ornament, the cut, and colour of the coat, the fall of the sword, and many other the like things, the grand objects and only improvements of modern travelling? What would mere reason have done for these gentlemen without this? Much more, what can it do in the more dry and unpleasing subjects of religion and virtue, without cultivation and direction? How can it be expected that the knowledge and habits of either should be attained, unless the reasonable powers

powers be kindly led to them, assisted in their inquiries, and in the most tender and friendly manner encouraged in their pursuit of and regard to them ? Or

Do we understand by reason, that which is the effect of a right use of these powers, *truth, the reason of things*, their connections, repugnances, and the consequences of each ? But the great question is how to come at this ? What art or science is there, that *self-sown*, ever rises up in the mind and flourishes without some friendly hand to plant and water it, and help forward its increase and perfection, and bring it to maturity ? Are religious and moral truths to be clearly discerned, in their nature, obligations, and importance ? Can they be impressed on the heart, and embraced as the genuine principles of a rational and moral conduct, if the education be such as wholly keeps them out of the mind, and the example set before our eyes, from our earliest infancy, calls off our attention from them, and leads to maxims and practices that are directly the reverse of them ? To you I appeal, the rich and honourable, to you who boast yourselves as the polite and fashionable part of the human species, to you, the lovers of pleasure, and devotees to inclination ; who have had the singular advantage of being educated to every thing but religion and virtue, and been brought up in high life, and blessed with the fair examples of a splendid and pleasureable ancestry ; what noble principles inspire you, what high sentiments of

deity possess your minds, how just your thoughts, how profound your reasonings upon all religious subjects? It must be confessed, indeed, your principles are not of the *supernatural kind*, nor are you at all beholden to the borrowed assistance and grace of divine revelation. No. Nature is your oracle, and the great originals you have copied have strengthened her propensities, encouraged her inclinations, offered no violence or restraint to her appetites, nor engrafted any thing of *Christian superstition* on it to debase and corrupt it. Sublimier sentiments elevate your minds, and nobler passions in consequence animate and inspire you! In that early part of life, in which ancient philosophy taught men silence and modesty, you enter into the world, out of all the softnesses of an indulgent education, exquisitely formed, and compleat in every kind of liberal and elegant qualifications. To you the most difficult subjects appear in all the lively demonstrations of day-light, and others that the generality of mankind, and those who have been the most laborious enquirers after truth, have esteemed as the most certain and self-evident, you have found out to be entirely precarious and ill-grounded, and learnt, without fear or scruple, to reject as impertinent absurdities. You peremptorily decide this grand world was all formed of atoms, without the direction of an intelligent cause, that every thing is subject to the necessary laws of matter and motion, or the arbitrary caprice of undesigning chance

chance ; that providence is the fiction of enthusiasm, and all reverence and fears of a deity mere contemptible superstition : That whatever is in man is entirely material, that at death he perishes like the ignobler brute, hath no being or sensation beyond it ; nothing to hope for, nothing to be afraid of after it. In consequence of this you dismiss the deity from all your cares, and are too polite to trouble him with the impertinences of your worship. The dispositions of piety are perfect strangers to your breasts, and have no place amongst the gayer images that continually possess you. And O what sanctity of manners, what an invariable rectitude of conduct, what perfect elegance and amiableness of behaviour, what high regard to decorum, character, title, station, fortune, and every valuable consideration of human nature and life, flows from such an education and such sentiments ! Who that observes them, or hears their publick characters, can help imagining them to be *the improved disciples* of a *Socrates*, a *Paul*, a *Locke*, or *Woollaston* ? Go on ye rich and great thus to polish and refine your children. Bred up in all the arts of high and pleasureable life, they will inherit all your virtues, never disgrace your blood and families, nor degenerate from the fair examples you set before them. You and they will be an eternal proof how extreamly friendly the love of pleasure is to true religion, and of the vast probability, the absolute certainty there is, that it will thrive and flourish

without any kind of education or example in favour of it.

And was the influence of such examples confined only to their own children, it would be more tolerable, and one would be apt to leave them in quiet possession of their own madness and folly, and give them up *as incurables*. But the mischief spreads farther, and the *infection reaches to all around them*. They are living pestilences in society, they blast whatever they breathe on, and spread distemper and death through every person almost they converse with. What are the domesticks and menial servants in the families of men devoted to pleasure, but either the mean and infamous assistants to their vices, or else as execrably corrupt as those they attend on? What is the whole family, from first to last, but a mixture of profaneness, extravagance, luxury, intemperance and debauchery; amongst whom innocence never enters, but 'tis immediately betrayed, or instantly forced to fly with shame and horror, as from infamy and destruction. The master's pleasures, the servants in their turns pursue, enter into all their diversions, and practice in their lower ways all the same enormities and extravagances of fashionable vice; whereby they become daring and insolent, and grow fearless both of God and man; fit to serve in no families of moral reputation and characters, and incapable of being useful as to any valuable purposes of private or publick life. How should they, when they have
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seen nothing but impiety and profaneness in those who have cloathed and maintained them, have oftentimes been made conscious to their worst debaucheries, been carried by them to every publick scene of pleasure, been accustomed by them to idleness, fed to excess, kept from all publick instruction, and thus prevented from every possibility of knowing more, or acting better than their keepers? Wretches thus led and formed by such examples, and allowed and encouraged in such practices, cannot but be extreemly profane, and run the utmost lengths of the most daring impieties. And by these means

5. The mischief *spreads wider and irreligion gains ground*, as it hath numbers, fashion, nobility, power, and riches, to countenance and support it. There is in many a strong inclination to be like the rest, or the generality of the world; and without enquiring whether what they do is right, and agreeable to reason, they follow too implicitly their example, and are especially fond of imitating those whom they esteem persons of fortune, character, and education; whose example they think adds a kind of dignity and sanction to the like practices in others. They imagine that custom is reason enough for any practice, and that they need not be more scrupulous than the great and rich; that there is no living in the world, if one must not be like it, nor enter into the ways and manners of it, and that *singularity*, either in principle or practice, is a *ridiculous precision*, that shews a
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man abject, and renders him contemptible. Hence, because there is too general a disregard to all the principles of religion and morality amongst mankind, they think principle, and a regard to it, almost unnecessary accomplishments, treat the principles of religion at best with coldness and indifference, oftentimes with great freedom and disrespect, and at length, that their conformity to the patterns they copy after may be more exact, and they may shew how much they have improved by them, they venture not only to call their truth into question, but represent them as absurdities, and laugh at them as impertinent and ridiculous. And as to all religious institutions and observances, because the regard to them is not *fashionable*, and the attending on them not practiced by those, who are esteemed as the patterns of elegance and politeness, they are in a great measure entirely neglected by these *servile imitators*, and held in great disesteem, merely for this poor and contemptible reason, because they would not be thought *singularly devout*. Yea some are mad enough to smother their own convictions, and act contrary to the dictates of their own consciences, through a wicked complaisance to custom and example, and a desired conformity to the manners of the profligate, rich and great, whose company they are fond of, and whose acquaintance and conversation they are fools enough to think an honour to them; though the almost only possible effect of being admitted to intimacy and freedom with them

them is, the being laughed out of their principles, the corruption of their morals, the waste of their time, and the ruin of their fortunes. And though *our ancient nobility* and persons of *real quality* and fortune, would have thought it beneath them, and a reflection upon their honour and character, to have made *mechanicks* and tradesmen *their companions* and intimates; yet in our times, when almost every thing *runs dregs*, the coronet and the counter harmoniously associate, the peer puts himself on a level with the *cit*; they swear, they drink, they game, they whore together. The fool of a *cit* thinks 'tis polite to be like *my lord*, enters into all his extravagancies, joins with him in his impious ridicules, receives his profane wit with approbation, laughs when he blasphemes, and becomes at length as *finished a wretch* as his *right honourable* instructor.

When thus qualified and formed, and tutored into the knowledge and love of the pleasures and vices of those he counts his betters, he becomes fit for extensive mischief, and sets up for polishing and improving in the same arts he hath himself learnt, those of like employments, circumstances, and stations. To these he relates with pleasure and boasting his acquaintance and intimacy with this man of quality, that person of fortune, and such a gentleman of distinction and family. He entertains his companions with an account of this adventure, such a party of pleasure, such a night's frolick and gallantry.

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He gives the shocking account of his profuseness and extravagance, his profaneness and vices, with an air of satisfaction and exulting pleasure, and insensibly instils the soft and pleasing poison, the passion for pleasure and the love of criminal indulgences, into the hearts of his associates *. If at first his impiety and wickedness create an horror in any of his companions, whose education hath led them to a disapprobation of such extravagances, and in whom there are any remains of tenderness of conscience, sense of deity, or knowledge of good and evil ; frequent converse gradually takes off that horror. At length they can hear every thing without trembling, after this, with a kind of approbation and pleasure. Then they enter into the first measures of vice, gradually grow dexterous proficient in it, and at last learn to practice all the pleasures of iniquity with full approbation and greediness. If any lesser fears should for a while continue, and conscience should shew any reluctance to the desperate measures into which they are drawing ; banter and ridicule will in time entirely suppress them, and the bold and daring examples of those they converse with, fortify them against all their apprehensions, and render them every hour more and more insensible, They will be taught to call their reluctance

* ——— Ye little think how nigh
Your change approaches, when your virtuous joys
Shall vanish, and deliver ye to woe.

Milt. Par. L. B. 4. v. 366.

to vice, squeamishness ; their fears of God and a future state, superstition ; and the history and principles of religion, old women's fables ; or by that all controuling name, which by a kind of magick power crushes all the force of demonstration and truth, and overthrows the credit of all past histories ; I mean the dreadful name of *priestcraft*.

Thus the love of pleasure and the vices and impieties attending it, enter into mercantile life, and spread themselves through all the various ranks and degrees of men engaged in trade and commerce. One wretch that is deeply sunk into them, infects all he can within the compass of his acquaintance, and lays snares to debauch and ruin all that are around him. When he is once become a finished profligate himself, with a *devilish malice* he beholds virtue in another, and is uneasy and restless till he hath destroyed it *. And as his own criminal pleasures have made it necessary for him to renounce all principles, he not only becomes a professed enemy to all without exception, that profess to instruct and ground others in the knowledge of them ; but sets up for an instructor in the

* Like Milton's Devil. — League with you I seek
And mutual amity, so strait, so close,
That I with you must dwell, or you with me.
And should I at your harmless Innocence
Melt, as I do, yet publick reason just,
Honour and Empire, with revenge enlarg'd
————— compels me now,
To do, what else, though damned I should abhor.

Par. Lost, B. 4, v. 375 — 388, &c.

scheme

scheme of infidelity, propagates impiety, spreads contempt of religion, and endeavours to seduce young and unsettled minds into an utter disregard to all the most sacred obligations and duties. So sovereign is the aversion of men of this cast to truth and principle, that they wish them utterly discarded from human society; that none might remain to preserve the ungrateful remembrance of them, and reproach their conduct by a different and better behaviour. And 'tis to the assiduous endeavours and vile insinuations of these pests of society, that we owe the early corruption of so many of the youth of the present age, in all classes of life, who are beguiled into destructive pleasures, and too easily and naturally led into scepticism and infidelity, in order to quiet their minds, and render themselves easy in their criminal indulgences. And 'tis a remark that will ever hold good, that as the love of pleasure prevails, impiety will spread; and the circumstances of our own age abundantly confirm it, in which many of all ranks and degrees seem devoted to the pursuit of pleasure, and in consequence of it are grown indifferent to, and have discarded all belief of the most unquestionable and sacred principles.

For this love of pleasure, and that profaneness which is the effect of it, hath gone down even to those who are in the *lowest classes* of life. That men of fortune and affluence should sink into luxury and softness is less to be wondered at, not only because they have
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the means to gratify all their passions and inclinations, but because they are generally bred up without employment, and even with an aversion to the labour and fatigue of business, and because they are taught no other use or value of riches, but as the price and purchase of every sensual indulgence, and as they procure all the various gratifications, in which the thoughtless part of mankind place the true happiness of human life. But one would think that nature and providence had excluded those of straiter circumstances from many of the criminal pleasures of the rich, and that their poverty and difficulties would be a powerful restraint upon their passions, inure them to frugality and good œconomy, reconcile them to labour and industry, and naturally lead them into such reflections, as might help to ballance the disadvantages of their condition, and put them upon serious endeavours to secure the advantages and pleasures of religion. Had they this wisdom, they would soon learn to pass the proper judgment and estimate upon the guilty follies, and mad indulgences of the debauched and profligate rich, be convinced that a religious and virtuous poverty, is infinitely preferable to all the sinful pleasures of grandeur and plenty, and look down upon prosperous sinners without envying their lot, with a superior air of pity and contempt.

But even the rich and great are scarce guilty of more horrid enormities, or chargeable with greater impieties than the lowest
and

and poorest of mankind. These two classes, how different soever their circumstances, seem to vie with each other, who shall be most desperately wicked and profane. The servants and domesticks of great families enter into all the passions of their superiors, and think they have nothing to fear from imitating their masters in their pleasures. The conversations they are accustomed to hear at their tables, and in the hours of revelling and mirth ; such as frequently transgress all the bounds of decency and honour, and as truly *polite and well bred gentlemen* would be ashamed of ; prepare them for all the excesses of vice, and wipe out of their minds every impression and sentiment in favour of religion and virtue. And by conversing with tradesmen in lower life, and with those who are bred up in laborious and servile employments, they tempt and reconcile them to excesses and debaucheries, render them blasphemers and fearless of God, and teach them a contempt of every thing that is sacred and good. As all the various conditions and relations of life are connected with each other, from the highest to the lowest, as they have a mutual dependence, and as there is a constant intercourse and commerce between them ; as this is unavoidable to circulate the affairs and carry on the business of life ; 'tis impossible, but that if any one branch be thoroughly corrupted, the infection must gradually spread, and at length diffuse the contagion amongst great numbers in every different state of life. Especially

cially as a fondness for imitating others is a very powerful and prevailing passion of human nature, and most powerful when the example given hath the lustre and dignity of external circumstances to recommend it.

Let it be farther considered, that in an age of pleasure, and when the love of it becomes the general passion, there must be great numbers employed as proper instruments and ministers to provide for the gratification of the publick taste, and to procure and regulate those diversions and amusements, that are so eagerly and generally sought after. The rich will not fail to encourage those who can serve them in this respect, and whatever be their characters, to caress and reward them as the most valuable and useful members of society. At the same time persons of desperate or broken fortunes, who cannot bear the confinement of business, or who have ruined themselves by neglecting it, will set themselves to contrive new entertainments, and furnish out fresh scenes of pleasures. As these multiply and grow, new trades and occupations arise, and gradually employ considerable numbers, who subsist upon the publick follies and vices. And as such kind of employments are generally very lucrative, those who engage in them will scarce entertain a bad opinion of those pleasures by which they live, and frequently gain considerable fortunes; and are indeed too often themselves as unprincipled and profligate as those whose creatures they

are, and to whose vices they are subservient. And by these means pleasure becomes an almost necessary evil in society, the encroachments of it grow wider and wider, great numbers are engaged in interest for the support of it, numerous families subsist by it, and the correcting or retrenching it by wholesome laws becomes a very difficult and dangerous thing, and cannot oftentimes be effectually done, without injuring property, bearing hard upon families, depriving them of the means of maintenance, raising clamours, creating disaffection to government, and endangering the peace and welfare of civil society. I may add, that too often government itself makes its advantage of these corruptions, and draws them in as sources to the supply of its expences; whereby the disposition to pleasure receives the publick sanction and encouragement. For I think nothing is more evident, than that the so taxing luxury and pleasure, as to leave the people full liberty to indulge these, is a kind of political approbation of them, and little less than countenancing and establishing them by law. And I am afraid that few governments are so virtuous, and managed upon such principles of integrity and honour, as that when they have found the way to supply their own necessities by the extravagances and follies of the people, to be easily persuaded to part with their funds, or over desirous of a publick reformation, that would lessen the sources of their own revenues. And when thus publick and private
interests

interests unite to encrease the spread of sensuality and pleasure, the love of these must make large advances in a nation, and irreligion and vice triumph by a necessary consequence and proportion.

What hath greatly helped to spread this evil amongst ourselves, and to draw in persons of all characters, ranks and employments, from the greatest to the least, is, the numerous places of pleasure that are opened all around us, to which all the various classes of mankind may resort; in which there are diversions of every price, suited to the meanest circumstances, and the very refuse of the people. Plays and interludes, which a few years ago had an appearance of somewhat of dignity in them, when the number of houses where they were acted were fewer, and they were regarded as the proper entertainments of the fashionable and rich, are now performed almost at every end of the city, and received into scandalous and dirty houses of entertainment, for the scum of mankind to haunt. Our publick papers abound every day with advertisements of this kind. The diversions of musick, more innocent in themselves, and that carry less *immediate danger* of debauching mens morals and principles, are by the low prices affixed to them, and the many places where they are to be found, become little less than a publick nuisance and grievance. For as such sort of entertainments relax and unbend the mind, dispose to softness and indolence, and powerfully instill the

love of gaiety and pleasure, so when they become general, they must have their share in vitiating the taste, and corrupting the manners of the people ; and too often prepare them for indulgences of a more extravagant and criminal nature, especially as there are never wanting at these entertainments persons who frequent them for the worst of purposes, and to make a prey of the simple and unwary. It would be endless to mention the various kinds and places of pleasure, that are now furnished out in and about this city, for the gentleman and tradesman, the rich and poor, masters and servants. Every man's taste and purse is consulted, and nothing omitted that may tempt and beguile all without exception to countenance by their presence and example, that fondness for pleasure, which is the reigning taste of the present age, which hath almost put religion out of countenance, and which if it grows in proportion as it hath done for some years past, will grow near to extinguish the very appearance and form of it.

But this is an effect of pleasure, that many would rejoice to see real, and if no worse fruits arise from it than this, we shall never persuade them to lend their assistance towards suppressing or retrenching the spread of it. I beg leave therefore to consider the bad consequences of such a prevailing disposition in another view : And that is

II. In reference to the *secular concerns* of the present life, and all the valuable interests of time

time, that call for and deserve our attention. There is nothing that hath a more fatal influence on all these, than the temper and practice I have been arguing against. And this will demonstratively appear, if we consider,

1. The certain consequences of this prevailing love of pleasure on *particular persons*. On what doth their present welfare depend, but on their right behaviour in the several ranks and situations of being, in which the God of nature hath placed them, their discharging the proper duties incumbent on them, the securing a reputation and interest amongst those, whose good opinion and friendship may be highly serviceable to them, their preserving their bodily health and vigour, their attending their proper business, and managing it with diligence and care, such an œconomy and frugality in their expences, as may enable them to carry it on with comfort and honour, knowing the right value of their time, watching favourable circumstances of advantage, and dexterously and skilfully improving them for those valuable purposes for which they offer themselves to them. 'Tis evident that the comfort and success of life, and the business of it depend on these and the like things, and he that hopes to be prosperous, easy or happy in his circumstances by any other methods, will find himself miserably disappointed. Now the love of pleasure, suffered to become habitual, and growing prevalent in the mind, is absolutely irreconcilable with

such a conduct, and utterly destroys all these evident and constant sources of prosperity.

How frequently do men by a constant attention to pleasure, *injure their health*, and *impair their constitutions*, bring upon themselves lowness of spirits, acute distempers, or chronic disorders, that often shorten life, or that render it miserable whilst it lasts, and greatly unfit them for the regular management of their own affairs, and making those improvements in fortune, which otherwise they might easily do. The pleasures of mere indolence, when they engross the whole of life, are inconsistent with established health, which is scarce ever to be maintained without suitable exercise, and a due proportion of vigorous action and labour. The immoderate gratifications of the appetite, in the luxuries of the table, and the excesses and riots of drinking, make a more speedy consumption of the bodily strength and vigour, open the constitution to innumerable disorders, prepare it for lingering decays and torments, or more violently rend and dissolve it. *Who hath woe, who hath sorrow, who hath contentions, who hath babling, who hath wounds without cause, who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine, they that go to seek mixt wine. . Look not on the wine when it is red, when it giveth its colour in the cup, when it moveth itself right: At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder **. Immoderate diversions, pro-

* Prov. xxiii. 29—32.

tracted to irregular hours, and indulged without regard to the bodily constitution, or fitness of time and season, however otherwise lawful, often bring on distempers, which if they do not prove fatal, leave bad effects behind them that are never to be thrown off, and which sometimes put a speedy end to life. I omit to mention those more criminal pleasures, which nature punishes with consequences the most shocking and detestible; consequences the most infamous in their nature, as well as prejudicial to the bodily welfare. *His own iniquities take the wicked; and he shall be holden with the cords of his own sin* †. In a word, pleasure, how enchanting soever the persuasions of it be, and in whatever form it appears, is a dangerous as well as sweet deluder; and when she is not attended and guarded, and under the direction of prudence, wisdom, religion, and virtue, seldom fails, sooner or later, of preying on the vitals of the constitution, and feeding herself with the spoils of the spirits, health and vigour of it. *He that goes after her goes like an ox to the slaughter, or a fool to the correction of the stocks, 'till a dart strike through his liver, or as a bird that hasteneth to the snare, and knows not that it is for his life.*

Again, the love of pleasure wastes and consumes mens time, and engrosses many of the best opportunities, which ought and might be

† Prov. v. 22.

improved to the most valuable purposes. This is the grand season for securing all the best advantages of life, and is amongst the number of those blessings, which when once lost, are never to be recalled; 'tis therefore equally a point of wisdom and interest to husband it well, and not prodigally waste and trifle it away, in impertinent amusements of no consequence to rational beings, and which cannot be the least subservient to the true ends and interests of life. The improvement of the mind by principles of useful knowledge, by cultivating the dispositions of rational piety, and strengthening the habits of justice, benevolence, temperance, and all the private and social virtues, demand a proper share of the time of life, and can never be carried on to any great perfection, unless some considerable portion of it be allotted to this purpose. In business and the affairs of commerce, 'tis of the utmost importance to watch every favourable season that offers, to be always in the way of transacting our own concerns, with those that may choose to have any dealings with us, and to contrive and manage so, as that we may carry on the correspondence of life with integrity, reputation, and honour, with ease and comfort, and prosperity. Especially when persons first enter into the world, business requires the strictest and closest attendance, must be dexterously invited, and courted, and cherished by frugality, application, and constant diligence. Pleasures
should

should scarce ever enter into the head of a man of business, and all the solicitations of it should be looked on as so many attempts to rob him of his time, *i. e.* his fortune and success. Few wise persons will chuse to have any transactions with men that are frequently absent from their own concerns, because in such they can never expect that punctuality which is the life of business, and they will justly reason, he that neglects his own affairs can never be careful in those which belong to others. The keeping accounts with order and exactness, the providing for the payment of just debts, the seasonable gathering in those that are due in the course of business, the watching proper opportunities for buying, and the observing the most advantageous seasons for disposing of what is purchased; these, and other like incidents in commerce, will find men full employment for all their time, if they are not wanting to their own interest, and if they rightly consider, abundantly convince them, that business and pleasure are absolutely inconsistent, and irreconcilable with each other. For what is there that destroys and waists men's time more than pleasure? Both cannot, in the nature of the thing, be minded at once. The time that is devoted to the one must be lost to the other. If the tendency to pleasure prevails, the very inclination to business must lessen, and if that be pursued, the other must be proportionably neglected. And the truth of this is demonstrated

strated by a thousand facts. To what is the failure of so many in the common concerns of life owing, but their sacrificing those hours to diversion and unnecessary amusement, that should be appropriated to their secular employments? From the afternoon of every Friday to the Tuesday morning following, is the common portion allotted by tradesmen in low life, to idleness and recreation, especially for eight or ten months in the year; when they leave all their concerns in the city, for the pleasures of the country, to the management of servants, who often neglect their trust when their masters are absent, and often enrich themselves at their master's expence. Whatever affairs of importance they have to manage, they will either wholly neglect them, or do them in a very cursory and imperfect manner, that they may not be prevented from enjoying what they are continually hankering after, their weekly retreat from the burthens and cares of their ordinary occupations. And this desire will be still the stronger, if they have families to engage their affections; wives and children too frequently encouraging absence from business, and drawing in the easy, good-natured husband and father to omit the care of his own affairs, to indulge and gratify their own fond and unreasonable desires and inclinations: Whereby, besides the days that are professedly condemned to pleasure, many other hours, mornings, afternoons, and whole days are wasted away, without consideration
of

of any consequences whatsoever. And if the computation was fairly and impartially to be made, it would appear that the time thus squandered and fooled away, would amount to above one half of the whole time of life, to the irreparable injury of themselves and families. For the effects of such a conduct often appear in the loss of business, the making capital mistakes in it, the confusion of their accounts, great perplexity and difficulty in managing affairs, and too often in total failures and final bankruptcies. Besides,

As pleasure thus thieves away our time, so it really consumes men's substance and property. It is in its nature a *costly* and *expensive* thing. Among the lower orders of mechanics, the expences of *one* day of pleasure amount to more than they can allow for *three* days subsistence of their families. And among the higher rank of artificers, with whom 'tis grown customary to convert the Lord's day into a day of sensual indulgence; the expences of their excursions into the country, with the contempt of the grateful worship which they owe to the Giver of all their good, and in defiance of his laws, consume *half* the gains of the preceding week. 'Tis not necessary to carry the estimate into higher life. They who know the fashionable world want no farther information; and they who are strangers to it, would hardly believe the most moderate calculation. And all who are conversant with the affairs of our ruined traders and gentry know, that three parts
out

out of four of these, owe the distress and want to which they and their families are reduced, to their compliance with the solicitations of this *syren* pleasure.

Can it then be necessary to offer any more considerations for convincing you of the malignant nature, and destructive effects of voluptuousness, which, wherever it prevails, extinguishes all sense of religion, and every noble and generous affection, disqualifies persons for attending to or relishing the manly and exalted satisfactions of knowledge, goodness, and devotion, and swallows up the time and money, which should be employed in acquiring and enjoying these. Which destroys men's constitutions, consumes their substance, debauches and sinks their families, and having made men wholly regardless of any future interests, either of this world or the next, and reduced them to extream want here, turns them naked into the invisible and everlasting state, destitute of all moral worth, with eager and insatiable cravings after base pleasures, which they can no more enjoy, and utterly incapable of the divine enjoyments of Angels and of Heaven; and doom'd to suffer the just punishments of their inexcusable folly and guilt, tortur'd by fruitless remorse and utter despair, and the victims of *everlasting destruction*. He who *likes such an end may chuse such a life*.

But let these considerations determine you, my friends, to restrain steadily the inclinations to sensual pleasures, and to cultivate
the

the nobler desires and affections of your souls ;
that having been in a high degree *lovers of*
God here, and delighted to converse with
him in the exercises of devotion, and having
resembled him in generous goodness and ex-
tensive beneficence, you may share in the
largest communications of the divine favour
to eternity : *In his presence where is fullness of*
joy, and at his right hand, where are pleasures
for ever, Amen.



S E R M O N V.

Of the Purpose for which the Son of
God was manifested.

† JOHN iii. 8.

*For this purpose the Son of God was manifested,
that he might destroy the works of the devil.*

IN the beginning of this chapter, the Apostle having spoken with admiration of the greatness of the love of God, in calling, owning, and treating us as his children, and assured us that one happy effect of it should be, our becoming *like Christ*, at his second appearance, *by seeing him as he is*, draws this important practical inference from it. *Every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as Christ is pure* *. Of the purity of the master the disciple must be partaker, and we must be conformed to his image in holiness, now, otherwise his future appearance will be no comfortable sight to us, and we shall have little reason to expect to resemble him here-

* Verse 3.

after in heavenly glory. And the necessity of this purity the Apostle farther enforceth, by informing us, *That whosoever committeth sin is of the devil*, is under his influence, and belongs to his family, and that the very end of Christ's coming into our world, was to rescue mankind from his power, and recover them from those vices they had so long practiced in obedience to his suggestions: As in the words of my text: *He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.* In speaking to these words we may consider,

- I. *What the works are* which the Apostle here refers to, and in what sense they are the works of the devil. And
- II. *How Christ was manifested to destroy them.*

I. *What works* the Apostle here refers to, under the character of the works of the devil. And here the context will fully inform us. For the Apostle tells us, *He who committeth sin is of the devil, for the devil sinneth from the beginning* *. *Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin* †. *In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil* ‡, *whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God.* The practice of righteousness argues men to be the children of God, and whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin. Whereas, on the contrary, they who commit sin, and do not righteousness,

* Verse 8. † 9. ‡ 10.

are the *children of the devil*. And this is the *great distinction* between these *two great families*, by which it may most certainly be known, who they are that belong to each ; they who are of God's household, and the children of him their heavenly Father, *doing righteousness as God is righteous*, and abstaining from all habitual, wilful, presumptuous sin, because *they are born of God* ; they who are *of the devil*, and belong to his family, being enemies to truth and righteousness, and indulging themselves in the practice of those sins, which argue men to be in a state of real opposition and enmity to God, and to be of the same spirit and character with him who sinned from the beginning. Now as *the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil*, those works which he himself did from the beginning, and by the love and practice of which, all who belong to him distinguish themselves ; they must be the works of sin ; because he hath been an old, hardened, habitual, incorrigible sinner himself, and all his children give themselves up to commit iniquity with greediness and pleasure. This then is that character of infamy, which the spirit of God in revelation fixes on all sin, that it is the work of the devil ; that is, all *wilful and habitual sin* ; those presumptuous crimes, and transgressions of the law of God, which corrupt and sensual men are chargeable with. They are not the works of truth and reason, which these either dictate or justify. They are not the works of God, *for he is not tempted*

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to do evil himself, neither tempts he any man to do it, nor is he chargeable with doing it; but loves righteousness, hates iniquity, and will finally manifest his displeasure against it, by the punishment he inflicts upon impenitent and incurable offenders. Sin therefore is the work of folly, presumption, and madness, and of those who are under the leading of these dreadful guides. It is in all instances the work of mischievous, impious, abandoned spirits, and of him emphatically, who is at the head of the apostacy from God, and who, enraged at the loss of his own original happiness and glory, and impatient at the thought, that any part of God's rational creation should be happier than himself, not only continues his own crimes, but takes pleasure in those who follow his example, and fall under the same condemnation with himself.

But though *all* sins are thus characterised as the works of the devil, yet there are *some*, which are in a more *especial manner* stigmatised in divine revelation as his works, done by himself, or by others under his instigation and influence; particularly, *wilful ignorance and unbelief of the gospel revelation, under the proper means of information and knowledge, which the Apostle expressly ascribes to their minds being blinded by the God of this world, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should shine into them* *. Our blessed Saviour gives it as part of the character of this evil spirit, that

* 2 Cor. iv. 4.

he abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him †; and therefore they who have no principles of truth in their minds, or who having once received and believed them, renounce and desert them, and suffer them to have no farther influence, resemble him who is destitute of all truth, in disposition, and do those very works, of which he gives them an example, by his having apostatised from, and rebelled against it. In like manner, a *violent and obstinate opposition to the truth*, in order to prevent the progress and reception of it, whether it be by fraud or force, or by endeavouring to obscure and corrupt it, argues a very diabolical disposition, and that men are under the influence and actuated by the counsels of the great enemy of truth, and the subtle deceiver and seducer of mankind. Thus St. Paul tells Elymas the sorcerer, who withstood him, and endeavoured to turn the deputy governor of Paphos from the faith: That he was a child of the devil ‡, both because he was an enemy of all righteousness, and ceased not to pervert the right ways of the Lord. The particular sins of envy, strife and contention, that occasion confusion and every evil work, are declared by St. James to proceed from that wisdom, which is earthly, sensual, and devilish ||. Subtlety and craft in doing mischief constitute persons children of the devil, according to St. Paul §; the malicious and murderous disposition, especially against the preachers of truth

† John viii. 44.
§ Acts xiii. 10.

‡ Acts xiii. 10.

|| Jam. iii. 15.

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and righteousness, argue men to be of *their father the devil, and that they will do the lusts of their father*, according to Christ *. The love of lying, and spreading of falsehood, he also declares to be the employment of the devil, who when he *speaks of a lie, speaks of his own* †, from his natural disposition to falsehood, as being *a liar, and the father of lies*. Hence also calumny and defamation stand in the same list of diabolical crimes ‡, as they are the effects of an envious, malicious heart, are pernicious lies, and the genuine dictates of falsehood. And as there is nothing more villainous and execrable than *treachery* and breach of trust, and an intention to betray and ruin, under the pretence and guise of friendship, hence our blessed Saviour expressly calls *Judas, who betrayed him, a devil* ||; and the Apostle observes, that just before this unhappy wretch determined to betray his Lord and Master, *Satan, or the devil, entered into him* §: And indeed nothing but a devil incarnate could have been guilty of so atrocious, heinous and aggravated a perfidy. I cannot help adding, that the wars which are carried on by the kings and princes of the earth, through the lust of ambition, to enlarge their dominions, and through an avaricious view to gather in the riches of the world, and the spoils of nations to themselves, without necessity and justice, and contrary to the rules of humanity and honour, argue such a diabolical spirit, and are attended

* John viii. 4.
§ John xiii. 27.

† Ibid.

‡ Ibid.

|| John vi. 70.

with such ravages, desolations, cruelties and murders, as that it is no wonder they are ascribed, by the spirit of prophecy, *to the instigation of the spirits of devils, gathering the kings of the earth to battle* *, and causing them to delight in, and unnaturally sport themselves with the miseries and destruction of mankind. In a word, *hatred to religion, enmity to righteousness*, and the *taking pleasure in iniquity*, are the proper characteristicks of the *serpent and his seed*, and 'tis with the utmost propriety, that sin, in all the various instances of it, is stiled the work of the devil. For

He was the *first* who introduced *sin* into the creation of God ; the first himself in the rebellion against his maker, and who by his instigation drew in others to share his guilt and condemnation. The expression immediately before my text is remarkable. The *devil sinneth from the beginning*, plainly ascribing the *origin* of sin to him, and pointing out his obstinate *perseverance* in committing it. *He sinneth from the beginning* is much more than to say, he *sinned*. He might have sinned, and repented ; but to affirm *he sinneth from the beginning*, is to affirm, that he *continues* the same, and ever since he began to sin, he hath never changed his conduct, but persisted incurably to multiply his offences against God. 'Tis difficult to determine the precise meaning of the expression *from the beginning*. It may mean, in the beginning *before ever the world*

* Rev. xvi. 14.

began,

began, as the same expression certainly means in *John*, *In the beginning was the word, i. e.* before the creation of the worlds, because *all things were made by him, and without him nothing was made that is made.* And in this sense the expression will refer to that early rebellion against God, by which many of the Angels lost their original perfection and dignity of nature, and were deprived by God of their native happiness and glory; to which the Apostle *Jude* refers, when he writes concerning some of the Angels, *that they kept not their first estates, but left their own habitations* †, and who have therefore been reserved in everlasting chains, unto the judgment of the great day. The whole angelick order was undoubtedly created in a state of proper perfection; but still mutable; and in their nature, and by the necessary law of creation, liable to natural and moral evil. The perfection of no created being is so high and absolute, as to be without limitation and defect. God only in this sense is perfect, and who therefore *can never be tempted to evil.* There is nothing that he can want, and therefore he can have no desire after more. He hath nothing that he can fear, and therefore can never be anxious about losing what he hath. He hath none superior to him, and can have nothing of the dispositions of jealousy and envy. He knows every thing, and can never be mistaken. He can do what he pleases, and therefore can never be pre-

† Verse 6.

vented from doing what his wisdom directs him to effect. So that he hath nothing in his own nature that can induce him to evil, and therefore cannot be tempted from himself, and therefore must be above and free from all external temptation, because there can be no place for this, unless there was somewhat in his nature answerable to the temptation, and which might render it proper to influence and persuade him. But these things can be said of *no created beings* whatsoever ; because being created, they are necessarily *limited* and *dependant*. They have their wants, to which they are unavoidably subject, and there may be kinds of happiness of which they are not in possession ; and therefore they may be liable to the uneasiness of desire, and to be tempted by that desire to pursue the object of it, by such means as they imagine the most likely to obtain it. And as they are defective in power, they are subject to apprehension and fear, either that they may not obtain the good they desire and covet, or may lose the good they possess ; and therefore may be moved by fear, either to right or wrong measures, to get what they have not, or secure what they have. Their very perfections, and height of dignity may inspire undue elevation and hauteur of heart, and expose them to be tempted by vanity and pride. As they are not in the first rank of being, and do not possess the highest degrees of dignity and honour, they are liable to the strong temptation of envy and ambition. This very state of subjection to a superior may make them

aspire

aspire after independency, and tempt them to free themselves from the uneasiness of obedience to those who are above them. As all created knowledge is defective, they may be betrayed and deceived into a very wrong and criminal conduct; and as their power is limited, they may not be able to guard themselves from evil, and secure themselves either from guilt or misery. So that the *origin* of moral and *penal* evil is to be derived from the *natural imperfection* of every *created* being, which exposes them to the power and influence of temptation, and by consequence to sin and guilt, and the punishments and miseries that attend them. So that whatever may have been the original perfection of Angels, it had its mixture of imperfection; they were therefore liable to change; they had in their very frame and constitution what subjected them to temptation to moral evil, and rendered them liable to natural and penal evil. And when the Apostle tells us, that *the Devil sinneth from the beginning*, it seems to point out his early apostacy from God, and that he soon became an offender against him, to whom he owed his very being, and the distinguishing privileges and honours of his nature. Or his sinning from the beginning may relate only to the *beginning of this world*, and that original temptation by which he seduced our first parents into sin and ruin; the forfeiture of their innocence, and the loss of their happiness. He then sinned by falsehood and lying, by telling them *they should not die* if they eat

the forbidden fruit, but that they *should be like Gods* †; upon which account our Saviour declares, that *from the beginning he abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him; and that when he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own, because he is a liar, and the father of it.* And as by a lie he deceived our first parents into sin, he deceived them into destruction; and so in our Lord's expression, he was a *murderer from the beginning*, the destroyer of the whole human race, as by his false insinuations he brought them under the condemnation of death. Sin therefore is with great propriety said to be the work of the devil, because he *first* disordered and defiled the creation of God by this execrable evil, falling from his original integrity, involving himself in the guilt of sin, and becoming the great example and pattern of it to the whole reasonable creation. And what shows, that he still continues obstinate and impenitent as a sinner, and takes pleasure and delight in it, as his proper employment and daily work, is,

That not content with sinning against God *himself*, he is in a very criminal respect, *the author of mens sins*, by assiduously and artfully tempting them to sin, and doing whatever he can to seduce and persuade them into guilt and ruin. It is at first view surprising, that *reasonable beings*, whose powers and faculties of reason were given them, to render them capable of the very high and elevated

† John viii. 44.

services of religion and virtue, of imitating God by works of righteousness and goodness, and securing their best and highest happiness, in the acceptance and favour of the greatest and best of beings, should become so intirely corrupt, should so wholly degenerate from all moral excellency and rectitude, and be so absolutely lost to all sense of and regard to their own welfare and honour, as to be wholly sunk into the infamy of sin, and delight to make others as vile as themselves: Especially, that beings of such superior powers, privileges and endowments, as *angels* are, should so far degrade themselves, and be so dreadfully changed from what they were, when brought into being by God, as not only to *continue* in their *apostacy* from him, and habitually delight in those crimes which are his abhorrence; but should condescend to become a kind of traders in vice, the mean and vile *seducers of others* into all kinds of wickedness, and by lying, false insinuations, deceitful, treacherous impositions, and by all the methods of fraud and iniquity, should make it a proper business to propagate corruption and misery, and spread that ruin in the creation of God, which reason, the dictates of justice, and every sentiment of compassion and goodness, would excite them to prevent. But the wonder will in some measure cease, if we consider what not infrequently *passes amongst mankind*. For how often have we seen persons of the greatest abilities, natural endowments, sprightliness and wit, who have made great improvements

improvements in science, and must be acknowledged by all that know them to be persons of superior genius and understanding : I say how many instances have we seen of such, who, notwithstanding all these advantages, have been the most profligate and abandoned, both with respect to their principles and morals ; without one right sentiment to guide them, or one valuable disposition to influence and govern them, in whom reason hath been wholly overcome by sense and appetite, and who seem to make little or no other use of all their valuable abilities, but to become more desperately wicked themselves, and to spread with greater success the dreadful contagion of infidelity, and all the most scandalous enormities of vice amongst others.

When men become wicked themselves, there seems to be in them an unnatural desire to corrupt others, and a real but execrable pleasure that they take in destroying innocence and virtue wherever they can see it, in rooting out all principle where they have any influence, and in rendering human nature in others as contemptible, scandalous, and sordidly vile, as 'tis in themselves. And what are these but *real fiends in human shapes*, the destroyers of men, and the murderers of their souls, by false insinuation and lying suggestions, and so acting the part, and doing the works of the devil, and doing it more effectually under the appearance of men. For 'tis one of the prevailing characters of this evil spirit in the sacred writings, that he is a *tempter* to sin.

Undoubtedly

Undoubtedly he seduced many of the angels to be partakers with him in his guilt. He entered paradise, tempted and actually seduced our first parents, and by them introduced sin and death into the world. He insolently tempted our blessed Lord, but there found himself absolutely disappointed, and Jesus was the only instance amongst the sons of men, where his temptations were wholly ineffectual. He hath been the great patron of sin, and the mean and vile instrument of drawing men into it, in all ages and nations of the world; and doth not yet cease to go on in the same detestable employment, and to practise on the passions and imaginations of mankind, in order to deceive, corrupt and destroy them. And on this account sin is properly the work of the devil, as wicked men commit it by his suggestion, follow his example in doing it, and are employed by him as the avowed patron and original introducer of it. So that mens crimes are his works, as he acts by them, he is so far the author of them, and the guilt of them imputable to his account, as they are committed by his instigation, and he derives his satisfaction and pleasure from them.

But then it must be carefully observed, that whatever share evil spirits may have, as tempters and seducers in the sins of others, this by no means *takes away, or diminishes the guilt of sinners themselves*; and that maxim of the Apostle still remains true, *that every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his*
own

own lust, and enticed *. i. e. They are mens own passions, affections and desires, by which they are properly tempted or instigated to evil, and without which they would be incapable of all external temptations. *When lust*, or the inward appetites and desires *conceives*, grows warm and strong, fires and swells the imagination, and becomes big with the prospect of gratification and indulgence, *it brings forth sin*; sin is and will be the effect and fruit of it. And every man finds it so by continual experience. He finds himself prompted to sin by his own inclinations; the call of his appetites is what he follows, and when he comes to reflect on the crimes he hath been guilty of, he naturally condemns himself, knows that the fault is chargeable on his own consent and choice, and that no one could have forced him to have done wrong without it. He who tempts another to do evil, immediately discovers his own wickedness, and that his intention is to ensnare the person he tempts to his own ruin: And this is so far from being any reason why he should comply with the temptation, that it is one of the strongest in the world why he should reject it, and resolve never to have any thing more to do with the person who offers it; though the *tempter* is *accountable* for *soliciting* another to sin, and so far partaker in the guilt of it, yet as the complying with the temptation intirely depends on the determination of every man's

* James i. 14.

own will, the consent of which the temptation cannot force, that *compliance* must be *voluntary*, and the sins committed, in consequence of it, become properly his actions who doth them, *he is accountable* in the nature of things for them, and justly liable to all the penal consequences attending them.

Nothing therefore can be weaker than to alledge the being tempted by the devil, as an *excuse* or *alleviation* for mens sins, when it is really one of the circumstances that aggravates and renders them more heinous. For what is *his character*? Is it not that of a rebel and offender against God? That of an enemy to truth and righteousness? That of a seducer and destroyer of men? Considerations that should make them reject his suggestions with abhorrence, and abstain from the evils to which he sollicitis them, as from death and damnation. If sin be *his work*, for that very reason it should *not be ours*. If he will perform the mean and criminal office of a tempter and seducer, leave him to his guilt, but don't be partaker in it; let him go on to expose himself to an aggravated vengeance; but be not the fool to be ensnared by an enemy who seeks for thy destruction, and who is mad enough to damn himself doubly, if so be he can but prevent thy salvation. Bring thy passions under government. Guard against the habits of sin, let reason, conscience, and principle be attended to, *put on the whole armour of God*, and use the means appointed for thy safety, and his temptations will be entirely
harmless,

harmless, and have no power and influence over thee. *A bad heart* is the *most dangerous tempter*, and no man is ever safe, who is in possession of it. He is liable every moment he lives to be ensnared and overcome by it. He cherishes in his own breast an enemy, against which it is almost impossible he should ever guard himself. Every solicitation from without, will be strengthened by the traitor within him, and rendered effectual by his influence and persuasion. Expel this secret adversary, and all is safe. Evil spirits may tempt, but they can make no impression on a good mind. God himself is concerned for the safety of an upright man, and he, *under every temptation, will find out a way for his escape.*

How doth this account *beighten the evil of sin*, and how strong a character of infamy and guilt doth it throw on those who take pleasure in and wilfully commit it, in *that they do the works of the devil.* He who committeth sin, saith the Apostle, he who lives in the habitual practice of wilful and presumptuous sin, *is of the devil*, he is one of his children, impressed with his temper, resembles him in disposition, imitates his example, submits to his authority, and is employed in his service. Upon which account our blessed Saviour tells the Jews, for their opposition to the truth, their hatred of his person, and the envy and malice with which they persecuted him and sought his death †, *Ye are of your father the devil, and*

† John viii. 44.

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the works of your father ye do. He forms by his suggestions, and influences their moral nature, disposition and character, upon which account they are, in the *moral* sense, as properly his offspring and children, as in the *natural* one we are the children of earthly parents, from whom we derive our bodily frame, and those lineaments and features of our face, by which we resemble them, and are oftentimes known to be their offspring. And indeed how strong is this resemblance that men bear to this evil spirit, by the dispositions and habits, and practice of sin ! This wholly defaces the image of God, cuts off their relation to him, as children, and renders them utterly incapable of his approbation and acceptance. *For whosoever is born of God doth not sin**, i. e. wilfully and habitually, with pleasure and delight ; *for his seed remains in him* ; the good seed of his word, the principles of truth, and the ingrafted dispositions of piety and virtue ; such a one *cannot sin, because he is thus born of God.* A man may have the natural power of doing, what may be justly said he cannot do, in a moral sense. There is no man, who lives in this world, but is liable to sin, and therefore may actually sin. But yet he *who is born of God*, formed into the Christian temper, under the influence of the principles of divine truth, and in possession of all those sacred dispositions, which are essential to the character of God's children, such a one *cannot*

* 1 John iii. 9.

sin,

sin, i. e. delight and persevere in the practice of it; because it is what he abhors and detests, what all his best principles and convictions oppose, and what all the governing dispositions of his mind, and the good influences of the spirit of God, which he is under, do in the most powerful and effectual manner cause him to reject. And therefore the Apostle adds: *In this the children of God, and the children of the devil are manifest* *. *Who-soever doth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.*

You see here Christians the *grand division* made of *all mankind*: They are either *the children of God*, or *the children of the devil*. What constitutes them God's children is the love of truth and charity, and the practice of universal righteousness. What renders them the children of the devil is, opposition to the truth, enmity to goodness, and the love and practice of sin. But would any wise man choose to be the children of such a father, and to be the members of so infamous, accursed, and detestable a family? Can it be for our own reputation to resemble him, who is the most monstrous and deformed being in the whole universe of God, and the features of whose face are all composed of pride, envy, revenge, malice, hatred of God and goodness, cruelty, and every disposition that can distort and blacken it? And can any thing be said to paint out in a stronger light

* Verse 10.

the intrinsic evil of sin, than that so far as it prevails, it defaces the glorious image of God, and impresses on thee a resemblance of a fiend, and transforms the man into a devil. This is not my representation, but that of the spirit of God and truth. And it is not a figurative, but a real description, agreeable to nature and fact. For if the devil be, according to the Scripture account, a sinner from the beginning, and continues to be so, is the great promoter of, and the tempter of others to do it, then all those who live in a course of sin are really like him, imitate him as their example, and are in the moral sense his children, and belong to that family of which he is really the head and father. Are there any of you here, who are *habitual slaves* to the power of sin; whose consciences reproach you, with allowing yourselves in any of those grosser crimes, which argue enmity to God, which are inconsistent with the love and practice of righteousness, and discover you to be destitute of all reverence and affection for God? You would perhaps count it a breach of decency and good manners, should I tell you in plain terms, what you really are, and to whom you belong. I will not tell you, that I may not offend you. But I will tell you what the spirit of revelation says, and if you are offended it must be at your own peril. And it is this in plain words: *He who committeth sin is of the devil* *, and that it is this

* Eph. ii. 2.

evil spirit, who works in the children of disobedience. You see from hence whose influence you are under, if you are workers of iniquity, whom you are to call father, and from whom you are to receive your final portion and inheritance. And shall any of us thus choose to be numbered in his family, who is a rebel and an apostate from God, an exile from Heaven, and an outcast from celestial glory, proscribed to eternal death by the just vengeance of the Almighty, and who wants to influence and tempt thee sinner to partake in his guilt, that thou mayest finally share in his damnation. Retreat therefore timely from the paths of sin. Scorn to imitate the father of lies and wickedness. Apply to the grace of the Redeemer, that he would rescue thee from the power of the evil spirit, form thee into his own image, reconcile thee to God, and give thee a right to the inheritance of his children. Blessed, for ever blessed be God, who manifested his Son in the world, to destroy the works of the devil. Blessed be thy name, thou benevolent Saviour of the world, who came on this errand of compassion and goodness. Oh ! deliver us all from the works of this destroyer, and in imitation of thy example and obedience to thy commands, may we work the works of God, and be found in the habitual practice of righteousness, that we may become the *children of God*, and the happy *heirs* of eternal life and blessedness. Amen and Amen.

But

But there is *another evil*, which stands in close connection with *sin*; which is attributed to and the proper work of the devil, and which *the Son of God was* also manifested to destroy, and that is *death*. And that the Apostle had this also in his thoughts, appears from the context, in which he tells us, that the gospel doctrine obliges us to be of a different spirit from *Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother* *. He was like that evil spirit, a *murderer*, and by his instigation slew his brother. Destruction and death therefore are from the evil spirit, and equally his production as sin itself. And this sentiment is plainly confirmed by the author to the Hebrews; and the expressions are somewhat parallel to those before us. For as Christ is here said to *be manifested to destroy the works of the devil*; he is there said to have *taken part of flesh and blood* †, that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil. It was a settled opinion amongst the Jews, that *Samael* or *Satan* was the *Angel of death* §, and received commission from God to execute it. If the meaning of this be, that *all* who die are destroyed by this Angel of death, or by the *immediate hand of Satan*, 'tis an assertion that hath nothing in reason and scripture to support it. Distemper, old age, a thousand accidents will occasion death, without any immediate interposition of this Angel of death

* Verse 12. † Heb. ii. 14. § Maimon. M. Nev. p. 398.

for their destruction. Not to add, that with respect to all sincere Christians, this evil spirit hath no power over them, God having dispossessed him by Christ of his dominion in this respect, and given *the keys of Hades and death* into the hands of *Christ*. And therefore this expression of the Apostle, of the devil's having the power of death, cannot signify, that he ever had so the power of it in his hands, as to inflict it at his pleasure, that every disease of which men died was of his sending, or that every accident which put a period to men's lives was owing to his contrivance and power. The great events of life and death are under a *better disposal* and management, and the Christian need not give himself a moment's uneasiness about the power which Satan hath to take away his life, or hasten his death. He hath none at all over him; for by being recovered from sin by the word and spirit of God, he is no longer under the dominion of the destroyer, who cannot take away a single moment from the period of his life, and is not the executioner of the divine vengeance to deprive him of life, when he leaves this world, and exchanges it for an eternal one. For he is under the perpetual guardianship of the power of God, and interested in those gracious promises of the Redeemer, which assure him, that *Satan shall be trodden under his feet*, that the *good guardian Angels* shall watch over and minister to him living and dying, and convey him safe in his departing moments, into those
sacred

sacred receptacles of rest and peace, that God hath provided for his faithful servants, there to abide under the immediate custody, and in *the presence of Christ*, 'till their resurrection to a blessed life and immortality. However, there is a proper sense, in which death is the work of the devil, and in which he may justly be said to have the power of it. For

He introduced death into the world, as the fruit and punishment of sin, and as sin was his work, as he was the original seducer of mankind to it, so also death is his work, because it is the wages of sin. And it is upon this account that our blessed Saviour declares of him, that *he was a murtherer from the beginning* * ; because by tempting and seducing our first parents into sin, he subjected them to immediate death, and involved all their posterity in the same condemnation and ruin ; *for as by one man sin entered into the world, death also entered by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned* † . Death indeed was the penalty annexed by God to transgression, and which the evil spirit never could have inflicted on mankind without this permission and constitution of God. But as he knew the law under which man was created, deceived him out of his obedience, and prevailed with him to violate the condition of his life and happiness ; he became properly the destroyer and murtherer of the whole human species, and introduced all the

* John viii. 44.

† Rom. v. 12.

ravages and desolations of death, throughout all the various ages and nations of mankind, and so laid waste this fair and beautiful creation of God, which was originally formed to be the dwelling of innocence, the garden of life, and the paradise of enjoyment and pleasure. It is *objected* to this account :

That *Adam was formed out of the dust*, as to his bodily frame, and that the *materials* of it were *corruptible* and *separable*, and could have no principle of immortality in it. That he had as real need of the recruits of sleep and proper food in Paradise, as we have, for his nourishment and support, and must have died sooner or later whether he had sinned or not, without some powerful provision to guard him from mortality and death, and to repair those defects and decays of his animal frame, to which in the nature of things it was liable ; all this is very true, but an objection nothing to the purpose. Nor is there any difficulty in supposing, either that God at first formed the *original constitution* of man of a *more durable and firm* contexture, than that we all experience it to be at present ; or that he could, and did cause the earth in her primitive state of unwasted vigour to produce trees, plants and vegetables, originally with such *medicinal* and powerfully *restorative virtues* and qualities, as should prevent all fatal disorders, recruit the constitution from time to time, guard it against all inward decays, revive the wasting spirits, and lengthen out life to any supposeable term of duration ? The
longevity

longevity of the *Antediluvian Patriarchs* is expressly asserted in the sacred writings, and confirmed by many intimations of the most ancient profane history. And there are now many things in the vegetable, mineral and animal worlds, that have restorative, strengthening qualities, free the body from disorders, and tend to the prolonging and enjoyment of life. Let now the sagacious naturalist inform us, how the life of man, in the first ages of the world, was *lengthened* out to a period so largely exceeding that of the present generation; or if he will, by what means it *endures even to the present term*; and we may venture to assure him, that we, in our turn, will inform him, with equal certainty, how it may be protracted to any supposable term or period whatsoever. For I imagine that the same author of nature, who formed man for so much longer a duration than the insect, who lives and dies in a day, or a month, or a year, could with equal ease have created man to endure the whole length of the antediluvian race, which is not the life of an insect when compared to eternity; or for any longer term, or period of duration that can be assigned. And if it can be fairly explained, how our present food repairs the daily waste of nature, and preserves the animal œconomy in due vigour, or how the virtues of medicine preserve from the fatal effects of bodily disorder, or repair the constitution when emaciated and enfeebled by it; I believe we shall then be soon able to

make the discovery, how the food of our first parents in Paradise, when all the fruits and productions of the earth must have been particularly salutary and nutritious, might have perpetually preserved the vigour of the constitution ; or at least how the medicinal virtues of certain fruits and vegetables might have done it, had their ordinary food been insufficient for this wonderful and vivifying purpose. And that there was such a *provision* made, for originally *perpetuating* the life of man, had he preserved his innocence, is extremely plain from revelation ; which assures us that *Eden had its tree of life* ; and that when man had sinned, and the perpetuating his life must have proved the utter ruin of the world. *God drove him out of Eden, lest he should put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever ** ; i. e. lest by having perpetual recourse to the fruit of this tree, he should guard himself against distemper and mortality, and thus perpetuate his life in a state of guilt and misery. And I see no more wonder and miracle in this, than that by food and physick we should now be able to guard off disease, and continue our existence to sixty or seventy years, or any longer or shorter period of human life. Man therefore was originally created with all the natural means of prolonging and perpetuating his present life ; at least 'till God should please to translate him into

* Gen. iii. 22.

a better, *without the pains of dying.* And that God would thus have translated ~~him~~, seems to me at least extremely probable, from the instances of *Enoch* and *Elijah*, whose translations seem to shew us, what would have been the privilege of all men, had they not corrupted and destroyed themselves by sin. Death was therefore an evil man had it in his own power to avoid ; and though he made himself subject to it by his own sin and folly, yet as he was *deceived* into sin by the lies and perfidy of the wicked *tempter*, with an intention to destroy him ; both sin and death are equally the works of this malignant spirit ; and on the one account he is the *corrupter* and *seducer* of mankind, and on the other their malicious and implacable *destroyer*.

And as he was thus a *murderer from the beginning*, so by tempting men to sin he is *continually employed* in the same cruel and destructive service, and makes their passions and vices subservient to their present and eternal ruin. How often are the crimes to which they indulge fatal to life, and all the valuable interests of it ; whereby they cut themselves off in the midst of their days, either by those bodily distempers which they contract, or exposing themselves to the vengeance of human justice. The horrid destructions and ravages of *war*, carried on by ambitious and revengeful *princes*, with implacable and unrelenting hatred against each other, sacrificing thousands and ten thousands in the fury of their rage and madness ; Is not
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the *devil* executing by them his murtherous purposes, and glutting his spite and malice in the innumerable cruelties they commit with pleasure and triumph ? Are they not *his instruments*, and do his works and act by those infernal passions which he inspires, heighthens and enrages ? Could men act thus did humanity possess them ? They may ridicule the notions of a devil, and his tempting and instigating mankind to vice ; but they themselves too strongly prove the reality of his agency, and what manner of spirit they are possessed by ; a spirit not human or divine, but a spirit fierce and destructive, that delights in the carnage of mankind, and that sports itself with the misery and slaughter of the innocent and helpless, and which therefore demonstrates, that they are influenced by a spirit and policy *earthly, sensual, and devilish*. For what can the policy of the devil himself influence them to besides, or worse than this : Or how can they more effectually prove themselves his children, than by imitating his example, and doing those works which are the most perfect copies of his own, and of all others the most agreeable to his will ?

The truth is, that the entire dominion of this evil spirit is upheld and continued by the prevalence of sin and death. He is the author and father of both, as he tempted, prevailed, and destroyed our first parents, and involved all their posterity in the consequences of their fall. And therefore in the same sense

as sin is his work, so is death ; of which he may be said to have the power, because whenever he prevails with men to sin, he as certainly prevails with them to destroy themselves, and renounce the invaluable blessing of eternal life. *He that sins against me, says wisdom, doth violence to his own soul, all they that hate me love death* *. Death therefore attends his pleasure, 'tis his inseparable companion, it strikes the mortal blow wherever his suggestions are admitted and prevail ; and will triumph over mankind to the end of the world, who are all involved in the original sentence, justly and that because all here are in their natures obnoxious to sin and guilt, and must therefore submit to the penalty annexed to it by the wisdom and justice of God, which is death. And this ruin would have been irrecoverable and eternal, had not the mercy of God interposed. As he was the person in a peculiar manner offended by sin, he only could forgive it, and remit in any part the penalties attending it. As he is the sole author and lord of life, he only can give it originally, or restore it when lost. Every man therefore that dies, for any thing that created power can do, dies eternally, and can never revive to life and happiness. And whether as sinners, the penalty of death shall be everlasting, or finally reversed, must depend on the *good pleasure of God*, and can only be known to us by the revelation of his will. And

* Prov. viii. 36.

bleſſed be God we are aſſured, that neither ſin nor death ſhall be permitted to triumph univerſally or for ever, over mankind, that the power of the evil ſpirit ſhall be broken, and his dominion come to a perpetual end. And this brings me to the more pleaſing part of this ſubject, which is

II. To repreſent to you the *benevolence and grace of God* towards a ſinful world, in the manifeſtation of his Son, in order to deſtroy the works of the devil. But of this in the next diſcourſe,



S E R M O N VI.

The Goodness of GOD in the Manifestation of his Son.

I JOHN iii. 8.

For this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

IN a preceding discourse I gave you a view of those works of the devil, which the Son of God was manifested to destroy, *sin and death*. I am now

II. To represent to you the *grace or benevolence of God*, towards a sinful world, in the *manifestation of his Son*, in order to his destroying the works of the devil. *For this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.*

Considering this evil spirit as the enemy of God, and the seducer and destroyer of man; how could God more effectually consult our peace and welfare, than by sending so great and excellent a person to prevent the effects of his perfidy and malice? If *sin* be the *reproach* of human nature, if it *alienates* us from God, the *eternal source of happiness*, and if it creates
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in all, that are subject to the power and slaves to the practice of it, a real indisposition and incapacity for ever attaining their ultimate and supream felicity; the destruction of the love of sin in us, and our reconciliation to God by faith and love, and holiness of heart and life, is blessing us in the most substantial and durable manner, and is infinitely more desirable and valuable, than all the treasures of the earth that can be put into our possession. If *life* is highly to be prized, and *immortal life* and *blessedness* are the greatest objects to which our ambition, or most partial wishes can reach, what must *death* be! How formidable an evil! How uncomfortable the prospect of it! How immense the loss we sustain by it! The absolute loss of ourselves, of every thing we possess, and of all that we can hope for! The destruction of death is it not the reversal of our own destruction! To overcome this enemy, how glorious the victory! To return to life and happiness, how pleasing will be the surprize! What satisfaction and triumph will attend it! Oh who can sufficiently adore the exceeding riches of the divine grace, in raising us to the hope and giving us the promise of so signal a redemption! The Son of God was manifested to destroy both sin and death, both of them the works of that evil spirit, who tempts men to sin, eternally to ruin and destroy them. Consider here

1. The *person* employed to abolish these evils is of no less a character than that of the
Son

Son of God. Undoubtedly this title is given to our blessed Lord to set forth the *dignity* of his person, and to represent to us how *fit* he was to be employed in this errand, and how capable of effecting the purpose, for which his heavenly Father sent him. This adversary of God was grown wise by his experience, was well versed in the arts of deception, had grown insolent by success, was one of those beings who excelled in strength, and was not to be dispossessed of his usurpations, to be defeated in his policy, or prevented in his future schemes of destruction, by one of inferior capacities and powers. How unequal would the contest have been between one of the angelick order, and this insinuating and mighty spirit, who drew in the third part of the Angels themselves, to be partakers of his crimes, and sharers in his condemnation ! As to men, they were all of them become guilty before God, and inevitably subject to destruction and death, from which they knew their recovery to be by themselves absolutely impossible. Who then was sufficiently mighty and able to save them ? God would not undoubtedly employ an improper instrument to accomplish his own design of goodness ; either one too weak to accomplish it, or who by a transcendently superior dignity of person and character was above being sent on an errand, that would have been successfully managed by one of an inferior nature and station. And therefore God fixed on him to be his substitute in this affair, who is by nature the *express image*

image of his person, and the bright representation of his glory ; on him, who was his great agent in the formation of man, to rescue him from the power of him who had destroyed him ; that both in the works of creation and redemption he might have the pre-eminence, who is the *only Son of God*, i. e. the Son of God in such a superior sense, as cannot be affirmed of any created being whatsoever. A choice this, that shews both the importance and difficulty of destroying the works of the devil.

2. To effect this, the Apostle tells us, the Son of God was *manifested*. The manifestation here spoken of refers to his *incarnation*, when he first came into the world and tabernacled in our flesh, and to the whole of his after ministry, when *he came* publicly to his own people, and *manifested his glory* by the miracles which he performed, the doctrines he taught, the precepts he gave, and the promises he made, in order to persuade them to believe in him and obey him, and gave himself up to the death, to accomplish the scheme of his Father's goodness, and perfect the redemption of those that were given him. And there is this intrinsic evidence of the truth of Christianity, that though the scheme of salvation by Christ consists of many parts and branches ; yet there is such a mutual connection of all of them, and such an entire dependence of every one of them on each other, as that they all concur to produce the one great confessed design ; insomuch that take
away

away any one single essential branch, the whole will appear confuted and imperfect, and incapable of effectually answering the avowed intention of it. This intention of the gospel revelation, and the appearance of Christ in the world, as expressed in the words of my text, is to destroy the works of the devil. And when the several parts of our blessed Lord's mediation are duly considered, they will all of them appear to be of very great importance, and even absolutely necessary to bring to perfection this benevolent purpose of the divine providence and government. Let us consider here

1. *That the Son of God was manifested to destroy the works of the devil*, by putting a stop to the *prevalence and dominion of sin*, and rescuing men from their subjection to the influence and power of it. Our blessed Saviour, in *his own person and conduct*, foiled this great deceiver in every attempt to seduce and ensnare him. He maintained his obedience and fidelity to his heavenly Father, notwithstanding the most artful endeavours to beguile and corrupt him, and was the only person of the human race, who escaped the pollution and guilt of sin, and secured himself from the condemnation due to it. So that the Son of God may be said to have destroyed the works of the devil, as in his own behaviour he was perfectly free from sin, broke the force of all his temptations to it, trampled the tempter under his feet, rendered wholly ineffectual all his arts to seduce and

corrupt him, exhibited a noble example of an uniform, steady piety and virtue, and thus gave a signal check to his usurpations, and the triumphs of sin over mankind. But farther,

Christ was manifested to destroy the works of the devil, as the intention of his appearance was to *put an end to the impious idolatries and superstitions*, which had prevailed for so many ages almost among all the nations of the world. That *barbarous and uncultivated nations*, who had no arts or learning to civilize and polish them, should fall into mistaken sentiments of deity, and practice absurd and ridiculous rites of worship, perhaps is not so much to be wondered at; though I confess it lowers my opinion of the *great sagacity and boasted perfection of human reason*, to reflect that any, who have reasonable powers, should so utterly mistake the nature of God, as the heathen world did, introduce such a rout of deities, as they set up for objects of adoration, and give into such methods of worshipping them, as argued the want of common sense, and bid defiance to decency, truth, piety, and every just sentiment of the nature and perfections of God. But how much more astonishing is it, that *nations and cities*, where all the *liberal arts and sciences flourished*, who reasoned and judged well in almost all other affairs relating to the conduct of human life, and amongst whom there were men of the finest genius, and well versed in all parts of literature. I
say

say how truly astonishing it is, that *Athens* and *Rome*, in their highest period of glory, and with all their advantages for wisdom and knowledge, yet should continue in such a state of stupid ignorance with regard to the first principle of all religion, and not excel the wildest barbarians on the face of the earth in the modes and ceremonies of their religious worship ! This is most unquestionably fact, and abundantly shews that the *wisdom of this world* could not destroy this mighty fabrick of the powers of darkness, this chief, this masterpiece of all the works of the devil, Idolatry ; into which all the nations of the world had been deceived, and out of which no human power had been able to recover them. But *our Lord was manifested to destroy this work* of the great corrupter of men ; for he appeared to *reveal the father* ; to form men into worthy sentiments of God, to recal them to the worship of him, and to discover that good and acceptable manner, in which they were to pay the worship which was due to him. And as the Son of God came with this view, so he foresaw his success, and rejoiced in the sure prospect of it : Thus he says to his disciples, upon their rejoicing that the *devils were subject to them through his name* : *I beheld Satan, as lightening, fall from Heaven* *, i. e. divested of that majesty and power which he had usurped, by being worshipped as God, and cast out from Heaven,

* Luke x. 18.

where the ignorance and superstitious folly of men had placed him, as lightening, i. e. suddenly, and by the speedy prevalence of my doctrine and religion. And in another place he tells his disciples. *Now is the judgment of this world* *. God will soon decide the fate of it, and rescue it from those vile idolatries that have so long overspread it. *Now shall the prince of this world*, who by the superstitions and vices he introduced reigned over mankind, *be cast out*, be stript of his dominion, ejected from his employ, and be no longer worshipped as God by the nations of the earth. And as the great intention of St. Paul's mission to the Gentiles was, to *open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God* †, so wherever the doctrine he taught prevailed, idolatry immediately became the abhorrence of mankind, they renounced all the infamous works of it, reconciled themselves to the true God, and worshipped him through the mediation of Christ in spirit and in truth. And this must, in the nature of things, be the perpetual effect of the reception and success of the gospel doctrine, to expel idolatry wherever it hath been settled, and to prevent the return of it wherever it hath been rejected. Again farther,

The Son of God was manifested to destroy the works of the devil, as the great intention of his appearance in our world was, to re-

* John xii. 31.

† Acts xxvi. 18.

cover men from their slavery to sinful passions and habits, to bring them to repentance, to enable them to break off their sinful courses, and to return to God by the regular practice of all the duties of righteousness. This is the express doctrine of our blessed Lord himself. For he tells his disciples, *I am come, not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance* †. And when the Jews boasted of their freedom, he tells them, *that if the Son should make them free, viz. by saving them from the bondage of their vices, they should be free indeed* ‡; partakers of the most necessary and valuable liberty. And indeed the whole of his doctrine is calculated to represent to men the danger of sin, the necessity of obedience to God by doing his will, and the practice of righteousness, and the folly of, and final ruin that must attend the substituting any thing in the place of real religion, and the virtues of a good life. And with this evident intention of his doctrine the whole of his life and character corresponded; for in him there was no unrighteousness at all, nor could any of his most inveterate enemies charge him with, or *convict him of sin*. How should they? For it was *his meat to do the will of his heavenly father*, and he continually went about doing good to the bodies and souls of men. And by giving us such an amiable and perfect pattern he evidently discovered the end of his manifestation to be to save men from their sins, and

† Matt. ix. 13.

‡ John viii. 36.

from his power, who is the cruel tempter and seducer of them to sin, and by obedience to God to reinstate them in his favour, and secure them the glorious inheritance of his children. His Apostles after him assert the same important doctrine, that the end of Christ's appearance was to rescue mankind from slavery to their vices, and purge them from all dead works. Thus Peter to the Jews. *Him hath God sent to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities* *. And St. John, a verse or two before my text : *Ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins* †, i. e. as appears from the whole context, to recover and preserve us from the works of sin, that herein we might resemble him ; for the Apostle immediately adds : *And in him there is no sin*. This also is the burthen of St. Paul's epistles : Who tells us, that *this is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ came into the world to save sinners* ‡ ; both from their sins and the condemnation due to them ; and that *the grace of God hath appeared to us, bringing salvation, by teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in the present world, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works* §. This is

* Acts iii. 26.

† 1 John iii. 5.

‡ 1 Tim. i. 15.

§ Tit. ii. 11—14.

also farther evident from that abundant provision, which the mercy of God hath made to accomplish this great work of men's salvation from sin. All the *doctrines of the gospel* are *doctrines according to godliness*, that lead to and powerfully promote the practice of it, and it is the very end of our believing the truth to make us free from sin, and thoroughly sanctify and renew us. The *precepts* of Christ command us to *mortify every sinful affection and habit*, enjoin us to *repent*, to *bring forth fruits meet for repentance*, and to practice every virtue that can result from any of those relations and circumstances, in which mankind can be placed. The *example of the Son of God* is the highest reproach to all immorality and vice, and the noblest recommendation of every thing that is sacred, virtuous and praise-worthy. *His promises* are given us, that under the influence of them *we might escape the corruptions that are in the world through lust*, and that *we might be effectually persuaded to perfect holiness in the fear of God*. The good *spirit of God* is offered to us, as the spirit of truth and holiness, and that by his influences we might *be sanctified throughout, in body, soul, and spirit*. The end of his giving himself to death for us was, *that he might deliver us from this present evil world, redeem us from all iniquity*, and rescue us from the vanity of a sinful conversation with his own most precious blood, and *that our souls might be purified by our obeying the truth*. For this end he is exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, *that he might*

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grant repentance and forgiveness of sins. God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ, to enforce the commands of repentance for past sins, preserve us from the guilt of future offences, and establish us unblameable in holiness to the end. And indeed for what other end, exclusive of this, can we possibly conceive God should send his Son into the world? Had it not been for sin, we had needed no redemption. There had been no curse, no misery, no death. Man would have needed no forgiveness, would never have asked it, and could have had nothing to fear from the displeasure and justice of God his Maker. His innocence would have been his safety, maintained his confidence in God, and perpetuated his happiness in the divine favour. 'Tis sin is the one great comprehensive cause of all the evils that infest our world, renders societies and individuals unhappy, and exposes the doers of it to temporal and eternal miseries. Remove this evil from amongst mankind, the voice of misery would cease, and the world would immediately be converted into a paradisiacal estate. Restore to man his innocence, he will be restored to himself, to his God, and to all the lost glory and happiness of his nature, and God will pronounce him, as at his first creation, *very good*, behold him with approbation, and shew that approbation by the uninterrupted effects of his favour. It was therefore a scheme worthy the infinite wisdom and benevolence of God,

God, to send his Son into the world, in order to prevent that universal ruin, in which the subtlety of the tempter had involved mankind ; by raising them from the death of sin, and furnishing them with the means to discover his devices, and overcome all his temptations to those criminal practices, which, whatever present pleasures may attend them, are bitterness in the end, and utterly inconsistent with every valuable interest of our beings. And considering that all the various miseries of this life flow from sin, as the original source of them, I have no possible conception, how God himself could provide for our everlasting welfare, without saving us from this parent complicated evil, or rescue us from the power and misery of the *evil one*, but by enabling us to *destroy his works*, by renouncing all the works of iniquity, and working those works of God, for which God originally made us reasonable creatures, and *which he hath ordained that we should walk in* as Christians, and for which *he creates anew in Christ Jesus our Lord*. But farther,

Christ was manifested to destroy the works of the devil, as he came to destroy *the condemning power of sin*, and set us free from those obligations to punishment, under which he had brought us as sinners against God. Sin is the one great comprehensive crime under the divine government, is a contradiction to all the great ends of it, and a direct violation of his will. It is absolutely a contradiction

tradition to the purity and rectitude of his nature, what he therefore can never approve, what he cannot countenance and encourage, what he will not permit to dwell in his sight, and what he cannot but punish in all reasonable beings, where it is inveterate and incurable. And this was the end aimed at by the tempter of mankind, first to seduce men into an apostacy from God, and then from what he found as the effect of his own transgressions, to involve them in certain and irretrievable condemnation; imagining, that as he had no hopes of remission for himself, the unhappiness and ruin of man, when once become guilty before God, would be as fixed and permanent, and hopeless as his own. But herein both his sagacity and malice deceived him. God, who knew by whose devices man was corrupted, had compassion upon his unhappy and deluded creature, and contrived the method both how to restore him from the power and practice of sin, and consistent with the honour and interest of his own character and government, to free him from that condemnation, under which he had brought himself. *He sent his Son into the world, not to condemn it, but that the world through him might be saved, and that whosoever would believe in him, should not perish but have everlasting life.* And to effect this great purpose, he received a commandment from his Father to lay down his life for his sheep, whom the Father had given him, and was sent by him to be the propitiation for
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their sins ; that having thus cleansed us from our sins in his own blood, he might reconcile us to God, deliver us from wrath, and restore us to the blessed and glorious hope of an happy immortality in the kingdom and presence of God. Oh ! how kind a provision is this to prevent the everlasting triumphs both of *sin and death* ; and when restored by the word and spirit of God from the dominion and prevalence of sin, and by the Almighty power of God from the corruption of the grave, and the ruins of death, then shall these works of the devil be entirely destroyed, his arts no more beguile us, his temptations no more endanger us, nor the fear of final condemnation interrupt our peace, nor give us one moment's anxiety and pain. Let us reflect

What a *mark of infamy* is here set upon *sin*, in that it is declared by the spirit of God to be the *work of the devil*, and that the *manifestation of the Son of God was necessary to destroy it* ! It is what Satan delights in, what he first introduced into the creation, what men do by his suggestions, what enslaves men to his power, what renders them his children, and from the destruction it brings, they could never have saved themselves had not the Son of God himself undertaken their deliverance. And is it possible for reasonable creatures to imagine that this is a trivial and inconsiderable evil, or that God can behold it with indifference, or that he will endure it with impunity ? He made man originally
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after his own image, and can he be pleased with thee, when thou defacest it, and puttest on a diabolical resemblance? He created thee for his own service, and to do those works by which thou mayest manifest thy gratitude and obedience to him. And can he approve thee when thou enslavest thyself to his power, who is his implacable adversary, and doest his works, by which thou involvest thyself in his crimes, and in his guilt? Hath he not sent his Son to reclaim thee from this madness, to warn thee against his delusions, to enable thee to overcome his temptations, and thereby to prevent thy eternal destruction? And wilt thou refuse this salvation, and by thine actions tell thy Maker, thou preferest the service of the devil to his will, and wilt persevere in doing his works, in spite of all he hath done by his only Son for thy redemption? Let reflection take place but for one minute, when an inviting temptation to sin presents itself to thee, and give thyself but leisure to ask: Who is it solicits me to do this evil? Whose work am I going to do? And what are the wages I must expect to receive? And when thy conscience tells thee, the devil is thy tempter, that thou art going to do his work, and that thy wages must come from his cruel hand: Will it not startle thee? Will it not make thee retreat, and when thou considerest that the action is diabolical, and the reward must be so too, will it not excite thy horror, cause thee to reject the temptation, and fly from it

as from destruction and death, and become the happy means of preserving thy innocence and peace ?

How *glorious* in itself, and how *worthy* the infinite rectitude and perfection of the divine nature, is this professed *end* of God's sending his Son into the world, *to destroy the works of the devil*, by turning men from their sins, and recovering them to the love and practice of universal righteousness ? How strongly doth this point out the intrinsic *excellency* of the *Christian* scheme, and shew its *original* to be *from God* ? If left in the power of this evil one, if governed by his suggestions, and employed in his service, we must be unavoidably undone, and can expect nothing but to share in his condemnation. But if rescued from his dominion, superior to his suggestions, and victorious over all his temptations, we *depart from all iniquity, yield ourselves to God, and become the servants of righteousness* ; we are secure from every possible destruction, have the principle of eternal life and happiness within us, and *nothing shall be able finally to separate us from the love of God in Christ our Lord.*

Lastly, let us therefore be persuaded to *renounce all the unfruitful works of darkness*, and *work the works of God, who hath sent us, whilst it is day.* What wise man would serve a bad and cruel master, when 'tis in his power to be under the protection of a benevolent and friendly one ? Who would be a slave, that can enjoy his freedom ; or submit to the vilest drudgery, when he can employ himself in
services

services that are the most honourable and worthy ? Can any man in his senses hesitate one moment, to which of the two he shall yield himself to obey ; whether a vile, apostate, proscribed spirit, who hath nothing but death and damnation to bestow upon those whom he can deceive into subjection ; or the Son of God, whose *yoke is easy and whose burthen is light* ; whose service is reasonable, generous, and pleasing, and whose reward is life and glory, and an happiness commensurate with eternity ? Let therefore no sollicitations seduce us from God, into the paths of sin. They may seem to be strewed with flowers, and appear to the eye of sense all delightful and joyous. But they are in reality full of snares, abound with sorrows, and end in destruction. But if *we have our fruit unto holiness, and become the servants of God*, our way will be safe, our minds be chearful, and the end everlasting life.

SERMON

S E R M O N VII.

Christ's Temptation in the Wilderness
explained.

MATTHEW iv. I.

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the Wilderness, to be tempted of the Devil.

THIS history of our Saviour's temptation is mentioned by *three* Evangelists ; by *Matthew* and *Luke* more largely, and in the several peculiar circumstances attending it, and by *Mark*, but in a more general and cursory manner, and without entering into the particulars of it ; and is I think evidently referred to by the author to the *Hebrews* ; who, speaking of Christ, tells us, *That he was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin* * ; tempted to the same sins, and by the same instruments and methods, though without falling by the temptations.

This part of sacred history hath been excepted against, as *improbable* and *incredible*,

* Heb. iv. 15.

and

and *Christ* himself hath been represented upon account of it, as a sort of *melancholy enthusiast*, whose head was filled with brain-sick visions, and notions of apparitions, and converse with devils; secluding himself from the converse and society of men, in deserts, to feed upon his own melancholy disposition, and indulge the disorder of a perverted imagination. And in order to get rid of this and other difficulties, some have imagined, that there was nothing *real* in this transaction, no proper appearance of the tempter, but that the several things related were only transacted in a kind of *vision* or trance; like what 'tis thought we may find in many instances relating to the *ancient prophets*, who are said to do, what was only done in a prophetick trance or vision. But this is to cut the knot, instead of untying it; and 'till the *facts* recorded are shewn to be *impossible* or *unworthy the character* of his mission from God, or *incapable* of answering any *valuable end*, I must continue to regard the *history as real*, and accordingly shall consider and endeavour to *vindicate* it as such. And here the following particulars deserve to be taken notice of.

1. Our blessed Saviour was *tempted*, solicited to sin, and to crimes of a very heinous nature, as shall be hereafter explained; and by this solicitation his strength was *tried*, and *proof made* of his firmness and constancy of mind, of his trust in God, and submission to his will: And this temptation was *extraordinary* in its nature; not only by the common

ways

ways and methods by which men are tempted and seduced, *viz.* by invisible solicitations, addressed to their sensual affections and passions ; but in an *open manner* also, by an address to him immediately in person, and to those affections and passions of his nature, as were most likely to be impressed and excited, by objects suitable and agreeable to them. For though our blessed Saviour had none of those criminal propensities and wrong habits, to which the rest of mankind are unhappily more or less subject, yet he had *all the affections essential* to human nature, and those capable of being excited and put into action, by the offer and approach of such things, as were pleasing and grateful to them ; and which in their nature, like those of other men, were capable of becoming excessive and irregular. And unless he had been in this respect *like unto us*, he would not have been liable to have been tempted like us at all ; as no external objects could otherwise have made any impression upon him, nor any motives from them had any influence to seduce and pervert him. We may observe,

2. That the *agent* in this temptation is expressly said to be the *devil*. *Jesus was led up into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil* ; and undoubtedly by him who is called so by way of distinction and eminence, that evil spirit, who is at the head of the apostacy from God. And 'tis evident that the temptation was partly carried on by him in a *visible shape*. But in what form he appeared, the

history doth not relate, and I cannot inform you ; but probably *not as himself* ; that would have been at once to have prevented the effect of his temptation ? but as a *kind and friendly Angel*, pitying his lonely and destitute condition in the desert, and in such a form, as might not terrify, but tend to reconcile our Lord to his person and persuasions ; and that the bait might be more agreeable, as thrown out by one, whom he had no reason to suspect as an enemy and seducer. It seems very evident that he had some apprehension of our Saviour's being the *Son of God*, and that promised *seed of the woman*, that was destined to crush his own head, to break his power, and destroy his authority and kingdom in the world ; but at the same time that he was not absolutely sure of it. This *suspense* of mind is evidently implied in the very first temptation mentioned : *If thou be the Son of God*, which he also repeats, when he begins the second ; an expression that carried in it some inward suspicion, that he might be this Son of God, and at the same time a doubt whether he was or not. However, to seduce and ruin him, if he could, was his determined resolution ; hoping, that as by subtlety and craft he had destroy'd our *first parents*, even in a state of innocency, so he might prevail by the same means against *Jesus himself* ; and who ever he was, might, by persuading and deceiving him to sin, render him obnoxious to the displeasure of God, and thereby intirely prevent every thing he had to fear from his character
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and influence. This seems to have been the ground of this attempt upon our blessed Lord, who was now entering upon his ministry; the whole of which must have been rendered ineffectual, had he previous to it fallen a prey to the solicitations of this insidious and faithless deceiver. We may remark farther,

3. The *place* where this temptation of the evil spirit was managed, *viz. in the wilderness*. He *was led into the wilderness to be tempted*; some uncultivated barren desert, far from the society of men, where none could comfort and assist him, and which by its solitude and waste appearance might excite his fear, awaken uncomfortable imaginations, give force to the suggestions that were offered him, and weaken the natural firmness and resolution of his mind. How *different* this from the situation of our *first parents*, when they were deceived by the tempter's subtlety; who had their dwelling in the *garden of God*, where every thing was pleasing to the eye, and all the various produce of it grateful to the taste, and good for food; that was frequented by Angels, and honour'd by the immediate presence of God, where almost every circumstance concurred to render them chearful, and so many considerations of duty, interest, gratitude, all presented themselves to their minds, to make them superior to every allurements that could be offer'd them, to transgress the law of their Creator, and neglect the directions he had so graciously vouchsafed them. And yet amidst all these delights, they were

tempted, and they fell. But how great were the disadvantages, how uncomfortable the circumstances in which the *Son of God* was assaulted by the same evil and destroying spirit! When all alone, in an unhospitable wild, amidst savage beasts*, without the visible appearance of God, without any friend or acquaintance to succour him, without any means of supplying his wants, or obtaining the food that was necessary to support him; where all was horrid around him, and his own necessities pained and pinched him within; he thus entered the lists with the destroyer of mankind, was for a season left to be practised on by his wiles, and given up to all the force of his most artful and insinuating persuasions. But though thus tempted, he stood his ground, triumphed over his tempter, and made him quit the field, ashamed of his repulse, and enraged at his disappointment. Again,

4. We may take notice, that this temptation was carried on by the *permission* and express appointment and *order of God*; for the sacred history tells us, that *Jesus was led up of the spirit to be tempted*. St. Luke says, that *being full of the Holy Ghost, Jesus returned from Jordan, and was led by the spirit into the wilderness*†; evidently ascribing his going into the wilderness to the immediate impulse of that spirit of God, with which he was filled, and which descended on him in a visible ap-

* Mark. i. 13.

† Luke. iv. 1.

pearance at his baptism, that he might be subject for a while to grievous assaults of the evil spirit, and finally triumph in his victory over him, who had long triumphed in the success of his temptations, and the victories he had gained over the children of men. So that the pretence of a *melancholy* disposition, leading him into retirement and solitude, and to secrete himself from all converse and acquaintance with men, is wholly without any foundation and support ; as the sacred writers expressly assert, that it was under the *impulse of the Holy spirit*, that he thus went into the desert. Nor indeed is there any thing in our Saviour's history and character, that gives the least ground for suspicion, that he was of an unconvertible, gloomy, reserved temper, that he shunned the society of mankind, loved the solitude of a desert, or knew not how to relish the pleasures of useful and friendly conversation. It appears evidently on the contrary, *that he rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, and that his delights were with the sons of men* ; for we find him present on occasions of *cheerfulness* and *festivity*, a guest sometimes at the tables of the rich, often shewing himself in the temple of his father, in the midst of the largest concourse of people, flocked after by multitudes, feeding and instructing thousands, ascending to *Jerusalem* at the yearly festivals, and so far from being a recluse, that he was continually, during the whole of his ministry, in publick life, and always employed in the most benevolent and useful services to

others. What were the particular *reasons*, why God was pleased to *permit* these temptations to befall our blessed Lord, supposing we could not give any thoroughly *satisfying account* of them, it would be no just *objection* against the truth of the history, since I don't know that God is obliged to acquaint us with the reasons of every thing he is pleased to permit and order. But we are not without such as will justify the divine wisdom and equity in this affair. *One reason* might be to *do honour to human nature*, and cause mankind to *triumph* by Christ over this haughty and subtle spirit, and all his powerful and insinuating solicitations; and to let him know that though he prevailed by misrepresentations and frauds over the first parents of the human race, and so involved them all in the sentence of death; yet neither craft nor power could profit him, when practiced against the *man Jesus Christ*; who by his intire victory over him, during a more than forty days contest with him, spoil'd him of the glory of his former victories, convinced him that he was a conquerable falling enemy, and that mankind through him should learn to resist and triumph over him:

It may be farther remarked, that this course of temptations was *previous* to our Lord's entering on his *publick ministry*, the great end of which was *to destroy the works of the devil*, and subvert that dominion which he had usurped over the children of men. Into this work God was pleased to initiate him by
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very grievous temptations from him, whose kingdom he was to oppose, that he might be inured to difficulty, cloath himself with resolution and firmness of mind, and by seeing with what art and determined malice he was, in the very entrance into his service, assaulted and persecuted, he might be, with the greater vigour and zeal, excited to go through that work for which he was sent into the world; be ever upon his guard, be ever watchful over his adversary, that he might gain no advantage against him, expect future temptation, and especially arm himself for the *last and great conflict* he was to undergo, when he said to those who came to apprehend him: *This is your hour, and the power of darkness**; and when through the extream violence of the temptation, probably to save himself from the ignominious and accursed death that was now before him, by deserting his post of duty, and renouncing his pretensions as the Son of God, he was in such an *agony*, as caused him *as it were to sweat drops of blood*†. These introductory temptations were extreamly proper to harden and fortify him against the greater that awaited him, as experience and success naturally create courage, and make men bold and intrepid in future encounters; and as an enemy, that hath been frequently overcome, is resisted with a kind of assurance of victory over him in every new contest, and the remembrance of past glory, the disdain

* Luke xxii. 53. † 44.

to lose it, and the ambition of final triumph, all conspire to render the resistance more resolute, by final success to add fresh laurels to the former.

Another reason why these temptations were permitted is suggested by revelation itself, and is a very important one, *viz. to teach him humanity, and great pity and compassion to mankind, under the various temptations of life, to which they are exposed in the present state, and that he might know by experience the uneasiness and danger of a tempted condition, and from the remembrance of his own feelings, be more warmly excited to afford suitable assistance and grace to his faithful disciples, in every hour of their trial; for we have not an high priest, who cannot sympathize with our infirmities, but who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin †; and in that he suffered being tempted, he is able to succour those who are tempted ‡; hath both the power to enable him to do it, and the inclination and affection, that will effectually excite him to it.* We may add also, that these temptations were permitted to befall the *great captain of our salvation, to teach his followers, that they must expect the same kind of opposition, and from the same enemy, that their Lord and Master had found in the discharge of their duty, and working out their own salvation. Every convert to truth and righteousness is a subject lost to Satan's power and authority,*

† Heb. iv. 15.

‡ ii. 18.

and every thing that men undertake for the glory of God, and to advance the kingdom and interest of Christ, tends to shake and weaken the foundations of his government. It is therefore no wonder, that as he is *restrained* by the power of God from all acts of *open violence*, he should endeavour by *secret temptations*, and the concealed methods of art and fraud, to prevent the defection of mankind from his cause, to recover them, and retain them in his interest ; hinder them by the prospect of difficulties, and the terrors of their own minds, from prosecuting any great and good designs, and if he cannot prevent them from attempting, yet render the work as difficult and fatal as he can ; and defeat, as far as his influence reaches, the good effects of such useful undertakings. This may be expected from the conduct of the tempter, in relation to our blessed Lord ; and God suffered his Son to become subject to these solicitations, to warn and forearm them, to encourage them to resist steadfastly, and assure them by his example, that God their heavenly Father will *out of every temptation find a way for their escape* ; that if they maintain their resolution they shall overcome, that He will cause them to triumph over this tempter and seducer of mankind, and finally reward their perseverance with a crown of righteousness and glory.

5. We may farther take notice of the *continuance* of *these temptations* to which our Lord was exposed ; and St. Mark expressly assures
us,

us, that *he was in the wilderness forty days tempted of Satan*. What were the *peculiar temptations*, with which our Lord was assaulted, and the *manner* in which they were carried on, whether in an invisible manner, by secret suggestions to his mind, or by an open personal appearance, or interchangeably, sometimes by the one, and sometimes by the other; as the sacred history hath not determined, 'tis impossible any person should be able to explain. For as to the three particular temptations expressly mentioned by *Matthew* and *Luke*, they did not take place 'till the forty days trial were over; and the two last of the three, as appears by the very nature of them, not 'till Christ was gone out of the wilderness. As to the *first* of them, his being tempted to turn stones into bread, the history is express, that *when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was after this an hungry*; upon which the devil came to him, and said: *Command that these stones be made bread*. And that he was not in the desert, when he was tempted the second and third time, is evident; because during the second he was at the *temple*, and during the third on a *high mountain*; and I particularly mention this, because this observation will, I apprehend, take away all the difficulty that seems to have attended this transaction, and make the whole account of it easy and intelligible, as I hope will appear in the sequel. As to the *methods* made use of by the tempter, during the forty days Christ was left to be practiced on by his art and malice, they

they were, no doubt of it, such as were well adapted to carry his point, and allure the prey, he hunted, into his net. A *wilderness* carries in its very appearance somewhat horrid and shocking to human nature. To be *alone in it*, without companion or guide, is a circumstance that must heighten the apprehension and distress. To see one's self encompassed *with wild beasts* in such a forlorn situation, must awaken the strongest sense of fear and terror; and amidst this scene of amazement and anxiety, to be left for full *forty days* together to the subtlety and management of a mighty spirit, who is by employment and office a tempter and deceiver, and by inclination and character a destroyer; it is not well possible to conceive of a more afflicted, melancholy, dangerous situation, than what our blessed Master was now left in; and whatever the tempter could do, to corrupt or impress his imagination, to *terrify* him from engaging in the work he was now about to enter on, or by more pleasing prospects presented to him, to *pervert* his mind, and stagger his constancy; no doubt but he exerted all his abilities to carry his important point, and practiced all his wiles and stratagems to destroy this extraordinary person, and prevent every thing he had to fear from his character and influence. But in what way he tried his power and skill remains to us an intire *secret*; though we know the *event* was defeat and shame to the tempter, but victory and glory to the Son of God, and
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the Saviour of mankind. But we are farther to observe,

6. That when these *forty days* temptations were over, our Lord, who had *fasted* during this whole period, and severe conflict with the tempter, *found himself an hungry*. When he had *fasted forty days, and forty nights*, says the history, he *was afterwards an hungry*. God had miraculously sustain'd him thus far, and he felt no weakness of body, or faintings of spirits by this long abstinence from his usual food. We read also of *Moses*, that he was *with the Lord in the mount forty days and forty nights, and neither eat bread, or drank water* *. In like manner *Elijah* travelled the same space of time without food, unto *Horeb*, the mount of God †; and in this miraculous circumstance, these three great prophets, *Moses*, the founder of the Jewish polity, *Elijah*, the great scourge of the Jewish idolaters, and zealous advocate for the true worship of God, and *Jesus Christ*, the introducer and mediator of the new covenant, *resembled* each other, in their being sustained without food, by the immediate power of God, and all of them in barren deserts and wildernesses; as a testimony to all future ages, that when God calls men to extraordinary service, he will support them in it by extraordinary means, when the common and usual ones entirely fail; for as *bread* supports us, only because it receives its *power* and

* Exod. xxxiv. 28.

† 1 Kings xix. 8.

efficacy to do it *from God*, and because he continues the virtue of it for this purpose; he can make the *air* or the *light* of Heaven equally subservient to this purpose, or without any external means continue life, and maintain the vigour of it, by his *sole immediate influence* upon the bodily constitution. It was no wonder however, that our Saviour, after so long a forbearance of ordinary food, and the divine power that sustained him was withdrawn, should find himself an hungry; and on this occasion the great adversary founds his first temptation, that the sacred history particularly takes notice of. Unwilling to quit the field, though repulsed with dishonour in a forty days conflict, he artfully renews the attack upon an occasion that naturally offer'd itself, and in a manner that cover'd over the malignity of his design, and was well adapted to deceive. *Jesus was an hungred, and when the tempter came to him he said: If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.* Let us here remark, that

1. What gave *occasion* to this temptation was our Saviour's *hunger*, after an abstinence of forty days; and we may very reasonably conclude, that his hunger was very *pressing* and *severe*. He was probably still in the wilderness, where he saw nothing that could minister relief to him, and where there was no human hand to supply his wants. So that as to the ordinary methods of satisfying his necessities, he had reason to despair of them, and knew that there must be some miraculous interposition

interposition of providence in order to sustain him. And yet how many thoughts might occur, on this occasion, to check any expectation of this kind? He found, by the return and sharpness of his appetite, that the power, which had wonderfully supported him for the forty days past, was intirely withdrawn, and that nature being now left to her ordinary course and laws, required her ordinary supplies, and must, in the common order of things, sink and faint without them; and how could he well expect a fresh exertion of that power, to keep him alive without food, which by the return of his appetite he actually experienced to be intirely ceased; or why would his Father have withheld it, had it not been to shew him, that he must take some extraordinary method to satisfy and provide for himself. This seems to be the natural situation of a person's mind in such circumstances, and the reasonings that would be most likely to arise in any difficulty, or upon any such emergency as this. In this strait, and during this uncertainty, how to obtain the relief he wanted; the tempter artfully steps in, and in some visible form and friendly address, accosts him, and suggests to him a method that would immediately bring him out of all his perplexities, and satisfy his hunger at once. And

2. The *temptation* and suggestion was this : *Command that these stones be made bread.* You ought to look for no farther miraculous support from God. That now fails you, and
you

you must therefore depend upon yourself, and procure your supply by any other means within your own power, or else you will infallibly perish by hunger in this desolate wilderness. These stones, or any of them that lie before you, immediately convert into bread, as the most ready and expeditious method of satisfying the cravings of your appetite, and easing the painful gnawings of the hunger that oppresses you. And to enforce this advice, he adds :

3. *If thou be the Son of God*, command that these stones be made bread. If you are that Son of God as you seem to be, that is spoken of in the prophecies, you can easily convert these stones into bread, for you may be sure God your heavenly Father will enable you to do it, and as your necessities now seem to drive you to this expedient, so by this proof of the divine power assisting you, you will have the most abundant conviction yourself that you are this person, and give me the fullest satisfaction and evidence of it too. It may be somewhat difficult to account for it, how this evil spirit should *know* any thing about this character of the Son of God, or have any suspicion that our blessed Saviour might be *He*. Probably he might hear and gather this *from the voice from Heaven*, which, just before these temptations commenced, declared him to be *God's beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased*. It is certain he is by no means ignorant of scripture, as appears by that apposite

apposite passage which he quotes from it, to prevail with Christ to throw himself from the battlements of the temple: And in *Daniel's* prophecy mention is expressly made of him, in what *Nebuchadnezzar* says to his Counsellors: *I see four men, loose, walking in the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God* *, And that this character was not unknown to the Jews, appears from the apocryphal *Esdra's*, who describes the Son of God, as crowning those who have confessed the name of God †. And in our blessed Saviour's time, the character of the *Christ*, or *Messiah*, and the *Son of God*; were understood to denote the same person, as appears by the adjuration of the High Priest to our blessed Lord: *Tell us, whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God* ‡, and from many other passages that might be mentioned. So that the tempter could not but know, from prophecy, and from the current language and sentiments of the Jews, that the character of the Son of God belonged to the Messiah. And therefore the putting him upon this proof, that he was this great and extraordinary person, and persuading him to exert his power as such, to supply his necessities in the midst of a barren desert, was an artful suggestion to his appetite and ambition, and had some appearance of a friendly concern for his relief, and that he should

* Dan. iii. 25. † 2 Esdr. ii. 47. ‡ Matt. xxvi. 63.

appear in the full character and glory of the Son of God.

But our blessed Saviour well discerned the treachery of the counsel, and was full proof against the intended deception, and gave a much better evidence of his being the *Son of God*, than by turning stones into bread, *viz.* by his obedience to his heavenly Father, and absolutely confining himself within the limits of the commission he had given him. Had he in compliance with the suggestion given him, attempted to turn stones into bread, *without* his Father's special direction, and the immediate impulse of the spirit of God, whose conduct he was under, it would have been an unwarrantable presumption, and an attempt to have wrought a miracle, where he had no occasion, reason, or leave to do it; and then the divine influence and power might have *failed him*, and the unsuccessful attempt would have at once sunk his credit, proved him to have lost his Father's affection and presence, and rendered him utterly incapable of accomplishing that great work, for which his perfect obedience was an indispensable qualification. As to any confirmation to himself, that he was the Son of God, our Saviour needed none, and the turning stones into bread was not a greater proof of it, than what he had already in his breast, or than what the testimony he had received from Heaven afforded. And as to any satisfaction, that the tempter desired in

this article, he deserved none ; and had our Lord been persuaded to attempt the miracle at his bidding, whether he had succeeded or not, the devil would have triumphed in his success, claimed him as his own, gloried over him as his conquest, and turned his immediate accuser in the court of Heaven. And as to the motive derived from the present hunger of Christ, it was a suggestion to distrust his Father's power and goodness, of which he had experienced such full proof, in his miraculous support for forty days past, and who would immediately himself have suggested this method of making bread, had it been agreeable to his will, that Christ should have taken it. Besides, as the complying with the advice would have argued a distrust of his Father's power, it would have looked as though he had set bounds to it, and imagined that God could not have supported him without bread. And on these accounts, the suggestion, with what ever appearance of friendship, and concern for the honour and relief of Christ it might be made, was insidious and ensnaring, and as such it was

4. *Rejected by our Lord*, and upon such a principle, as shewed the tempter it was impossible he should succeed in it. For our Lord gave his refusal, in those remarkable words of scripture, *It is written : Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.* It is a citation from what Moses said to the Israelites,

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to persuade them to obey, and put their trust in God : *Remember all the way, which the Lord thy God led thee, these forty years in the wilderness to prove thee, and to know what was in thy heart, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, and that he might make thee know, that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live ; i. e. by every kind of means that God is pleased to appoint and bless for this purpose.* Bread, unless he sanctifies it will not preserve life, and he can support it equally without bread. He hath all power in his hand, and can make every part of nature subservient to his will, and whenever the command proceeds from him, though bread should be wanting to satisfy thy hunger, other means shall be provided for the preservation of life, and even the desert itself liberally supply thee with necessary food. And how perfectly apposite was the application of this passage of scripture by our blessed Lord to the circumstances he was in ! How effectual a repulse of the temptation offered him ! And the answer in its full length was this. “ ’Tis true that I hunger. But it is by the permission of my heavenly Father. And he permits it to prove me, and know what is in my heart. And though I have no bread, nor any visible means of satisfying my hunger in this barren and desolate wilderness, yet I know he is able to find other methods of sustaining my life, and can immediately

send me down *manna* from Heaven, as he did formerly to his people, when hungry and fainting in the desert. In his power and goodness therefore I trust, will use no unwarrantable methods to supply my wants, and shall expect my relief in the way, and at the season which his wisdom shall direct." Thus ended the first temptation that is here particularly recorded. The impostor was detected, his craft and subtlety disappointed, and the Son of God gloriously triumphed in his full victory over the seducer and destroyer of mankind. We may from this account observe :

I. That even our *innocent passions*, and the very *necessary appetites* of nature, should be *indulged with great caution* and prudence, and never be gratified at the expence of our duty, and when the doing it will be attended with any real offence against God. Hunger is a necessary and very troublesome appetite, and the satisfying it a very reasonable and necessary thing, and every wise man will do it, when he can find the proper means of doing it. But there may be circumstances that may render the doing it extremely criminal, unbecoming our character, and inconsistent with the regard and submission we owe to God. In the circumstances of our blessed Lord, what more natural for him than to eat when he was hungry, and if he could not procure a supply without a miracle, how could a miracle be better bestowed,

stowed, and why should not the advice be accepted, to turn stones into bread? But our blessed Lord would not live by any means, that would discover the least diffidence in his heavenly Father's power and goodness, nor work a miracle for his own preservation, without an intimation from him of the propriety and seasonableness of it; to teach us, that hunger and thirst are preferable to sin, and that there are no passions and affections of our frame, however natural and necessary, but what may be unseasonably gratified; and that the question with a wise and good man should never be: Will this and the other indulgence suit my present inclination, and be agreeable to my appetite? But, can I do it, consistent with the reverence and duty I owe to God, and so as to give no advantage to the tempter to corrupt, accuse and destroy me? He often lies concealed in a strong inclination, and works it up into a powerful snare to destroy us. By means of this he drew our first parents into his toils, and made an appetite, innocent in itself, instrumental to destroy them and their posterity; and by the same method he would have seduced the restorer of mankind, and by one fatal indulgence, to which his necessities strongly urged him, would have deceived him into transgression, and thereby have frustrated all the counsels of God, for the redemption of the world by his mediation and death. And it is the almost constant

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stant method he makes use of, and indeed the only one he can be well successful in, to ensnare men into vice by those natural appetites and passions, which are good and useful in themselves, and inserted into our frames for the wisest purposes ; persuading them into immoderate and too frequent gratifications of them ; 'till by long indulgence they seize the reins, lead away in triumph reason, conscience, and principle, captives, and hurry men into enormities absolutely inconsistent with every valuable interest both of time and eternity. *Keep thy heart therefore with all diligence*, is an advice that should never be forgotten, *since out of it are all the issues of life*.

2. We see in the example of our blessed Lord, that a *constant sense of God* upon the heart, and the maintaining a *lively, firm and habitual hope and trust* in his protection and goodness, is the *best guard of integrity*, the most effectual support under all temptations, and the surest means of obtaining grace from him in every time of need. It was by this our blessed Lord stood his ground, and baffled the attempts of the evil spirit to beguile and pervert him. The heart, that hath no apprehensions, no reverence for God, Satan seizes on as his own habitation, finds it, in our Lord's emphatical description, *empty, swept, and garnished* * for his reception, fixes

* Mat. xii. 44.

in it as his strong hold, and soon reduces all its powers and passions into his interest and service. But the prevailing sense of God, the fear to offend, and the desire and ambition to please him, are barriers that will absolutely exclude him, either prevent his suggestions, or effectually destroy their influence; and when supported and seconded by faith in his goodness, and hope in his promises, will render Satan, with his utmost craft and power, an impotent harmless enemy, and secure us the final victory and triumph over him. These are dispositions and graces of perpetual use in the Christian life, and that by daily exercise we should be careful to strengthen and improve to their highest perfection. And lastly

3. I cannot help observing, in honour and defence of a good old custom, though looked on as obsolete, and actually grown into disuse by many, that since it is a most certain truth, *that man cannot live by bread alone, but by the word that proceeds out of the mouth of God*, or by his command, rendering our daily bread effectual for this purpose, it is a *decent and a right thing*, never to begin our meals without asking his blessing on our food, and always to conclude them by thanksgivings to him, who in season provides them for us. Whilst the principles of religion are true, this will be a reasonable service, and whilst there is any regard due to the Saviour of mankind, his example will

be thought worthy of imitation, who, previous to his meals, consecrated them by prayer and thanksgivings to his heavenly Father. Be not therefore ashamed of a practice in which you have him for a pattern, but acknowledge God in all the blessings of life, and his favour will make them effectual to your comfort and happiness.



SERMON

S E R M O N VIII.

The History of our Lord's Temptation
finished.

MATTHEW IV. I,

*Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the
Wilderness, to be tempted of the Devil.*

ST. Mark and St. Luke assure us, that Jesus was in the wilderness forty days tempted of Satan, and that in those days he did eat nothing; and St. Matthew and St. Luke agree in their report, that after this forty days fast he became hungry, and that the tempter took this occasion to practice on him, and tried to deceive him; saying to him, *if thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.* "You are now in a desert that can yield you nothing, you are pinched with hunger, you have no friend to supply your wants. Surely the Son of God should not want necessary food. If you are this Son of God, shew me the proof of it. Exert your power, help yourself, turn some of these stones into bread, and this evidence will

will be satisfying both to you and me." And friendly as this advice might appear, it was nevertheless insidious and destructive ; as it was a temptation to *distrust the power and goodness of God* ; either that he could not, or would not relieve him in his necessities ; to use unprescribed methods of supplying his want, and dictate to his heavenly Father the time and manner, when and how he should exert his power, and enable him to do miraculous works. Such a *miracle* as this, had it been wrought in the wilderness, would have been entirely *lost*, and no good end could have been answered by it ; as there were none to convince ; Christ himself needing not this proof of his being the Son of God, and the tempter not really desiring it ; but rather hoping, by putting him on this experiment, that he would fail in the attempt ; as well knowing, that Christ's endeavouring to do an unnecessary miracle at his bidding, would be no likely method to attain that influence of the divine spirit and power, that was necessary to effect it. Our Lord therefore, who saw into the treachery of the advice, rejected the proposal, by telling him ; *It is written : Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.* i. e. I feel my hunger, and know I have here no bread. But I have no need for this reason to turn stones into bread ; because God can support me without it, as he did the *Israelites* with *manna* in the desert, and make whatever means he is pleased to appoint

appoint effectual to my relief. 'Tis his prerogative to prescribe the methods by which I am to live, and my part, to wait for his orders, and to obey them. But

II. Being baffled and disappointed in this attempt, the adversary tries another method, and applies to a different passion, that by the influence of it he might ensnare and ruin him. In the former temptation he seems to have endeavoured to insinuate some *distrust* into our Lord's mind, as to his being the Son of God, upon the account of his hunger, and being deprived of all visible means of satisfying it. In this he tempts him to *presume* on the character, and give an open, convincing evidence and demonstration of it at once to the whole city of Jerusalem, by an action that would carry its own proof and conviction along with it. The historian relates it in the following manner †. *Then the devil takes him into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and says to him : If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down ; for it is written : He shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands shall they bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him : It is written again : Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.* Here we are to consider,

The nature and circumstances of the temptation,

And the victory of our blessed Saviour over it.

† Verse 5—7.

As to the *temptation* itself, the following circumstances deserve to be taken notice of in it.

The *place* in which it was carried on ; which was *Jerusalem*, the *temple* of God, and the *pinnacle* or *battlement* of it. *The devil takes him into the holy city, and sets him on a pinnacle of the temple.* The holy city is *Jerusalem*, and there are some ancient coins remaining of it, which have this very inscription on it. It is stiled so again by the Apostle * ; by *Nehemiah* after its restoration † ; and long before the first destruction of it, by *Isaiah* ‡ ; who tells us, that the Jews, amidst their impieties and corruptions, gloried in this, and counted it their security, that they belonged to the *holy city*. They call themselves of the *holy city*, and stay themselves upon the God of *Israel*, whose name was the Lord of Hosts, and in other places of scripture. And *Jerusalem* was called by this name of the *holy city*, because of the *temple* of God that was in it, and the sacred solemnities of worship, which were performed there in honour of him, upon which account it was regarded as the place of his peculiar residence ; the temple on Mount *Sion* being his *immediate habitation and palace*, and under his perpetual and distinguishing protection. Hence it is stiled the *city of God*, the *holy place of the tabernacles of the most high* || ; and the *city of the great king*,

* Matt. xxvii. 53. † Nehem. xi. 18. ‡ Isaiah xlviii. 2.
|| Psalm xli. 4

where God was known in her palaces for a refuge §. When in this city, he was led by the tempter into the temple, carried up by him to one of the battlements of it, and placed in such a situation, as overlooked the city, and from whence he might easily throw himself down into one of the courts of the temple.

It is enquired here, how the devil conveyed our blessed Lord into this situation. And the generality of interpreters have concluded, that he carried him forcibly *through the air*, and fled with him 'till he had placed him on the temple battlements; and because this supposition is liable to many objections, some interpreters of great note, have imagined that there was nothing *real* in this transaction, but that it was in the whole of it carried on in a *dream*, or *trance*, or *vision*. But as this account is liable to as many real difficulties as the other, I cannot easily come into either, especially as there is a way of explaining this history, which avoids the objections on both sides, and to which the history itself, and the terms made use of in it, plainly lead us. When our blessed Saviour came out of the desert, after he had refused to turn stones into bread, the devil takes our Lord into the holy city, *i. e.* prevailed with him to go up to Jerusalem along with him; *took him* as any one *takes his companion*, whom he presses and persuades to attend him; just as *Jesus*, going up to Jeru-

§ Psalm xlviii. 2, 3.

falem,

Jerusalem, *took the twelve disciples with him* *, where the word is the same as in my text, and in which sense it is used in many places of the New Testament, and never once for carrying any person by force from off the earth, through the air ; a signification of the word unknown either to sacred or profane writers. And when he had thus carried him to the temple, he by the same persuasion, and the permission of God, prevailed with him to go up to the battlements, and there *setteth him*, i. e. *brought him* to such a part of them, where Christ might easily do, what the tempter intended to persuaded him to do. This is a way of speaking common to all languages, and we *carry a friend* with us, when we wait on him to any particular place ; and we *set* or place him, when we *bring him to the seat* or station we have provided for him. And thus the tempter set or placed our Lord on the pinnacle, or battlements of the temple, by attending him there, 'till he had fixed him in the situation that he thought proper for his purpose ; in which sense the original word is used in several places in the New Testament, and by all writers without exception. The plain and natural meaning of the passage therefore is : That the tempter, by God's permission, attended on our blessed Saviour, from the desert to Jerusalem, led him into the temple, caused him to ascend to some of the battlements of it, and at-

* Luke ix. 10.

tended

tended him to such a part of them, where he might perform the miraculous leap, which he intended to persuade him to take, in hopes that it would prove his utter destruction : thus he addresses him :

If thou be the Son of God cast thyself down.

It appears very evident, that this was a proposal founded on a supposition, that Christ thought himself the Son of God, and was made, that he might persuade our blessed Lord to imagine, that this would be the most ready and effectual method, publicly to *declare and convince the whole city of Jerusalem,* that he was the *Son of God, and their Messiah.*

If thou art the Son of God, shew thyself to be so, by some extraordinary performance, that may persuade the whole nation to acknowledge and receive thee as such. Why shouldest thou conceal thy pretensions, why defer the publicly taking on thee this character ? Here is now an opportunity that offers itself, whereby thou mayest afford the most uncontestible demonstration, that God is thy Father, and be received at once by the whole body of the people, and by the priests who are now ministering in the temple, as the promised Messiah, whom they expect. For if thou cast thyself from these battlements, and the nation know, that no real harm accrues to thee by it, and they see thee alive and sound after it, and this thou mayest certainly expect, if thou art the Son of God ; such a miraculous preservation will shew how dear thou art
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to God, and dispose them immediately to own thee as his well beloved Son."

And to encourage our Lord in this assurance of his Father's protection, *i. e.* more effectually to persuade him to venture on this presumptuous trial of it, and thereby most certainly to forfeit it, and destroy himself; he cites to him a very apt passage of scripture, with a design to inspire him with this false confidence, and to persuade him into the rash project, into which he would have precipitately drawn him to his ruin. For this deceiver well knew, that the passage he cites, was never intended to encourage mens hopes in God, when they cast themselves into needless dangers, but only when they were providentially brought into them, and that therefore the application of it to the purpose he wanted to answer by it, was a false and a lying one. However resolved to try his strength, he will venture for once to become a scripturist and preacher; and to prevent our Lord's being shocked at the proposal, tells him; *It is written: He shall give his Angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands shall they bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone* *; which words are a quotation from the Psalmist, describing the singular happiness of religious men, who fear and trust in God, in that peculiar protection by the divine power, of which they might assure themselves, as the reward of their piety and virtue. And

* Psalm xci. 11.

the passage is artfully applied, to persuade our blessed Lord, that what he persuaded him to, he might do without any hazard ; because if the scriptures assure all religious men, that *God will give his Angels charge over them, so that they should bear them up in their hands, lest they dash their feet against a stone* ; much more might he assure himself, that they should bear him up, and preserve him from being crushed, should he throw himself from the battlements, *if he was the Son of God* ; and especially as such a miraculous preservation would be the fullest evidence of his divine character, and ensure his being universally received and submitted to as the promised Messiah.

But this was too shallow reasoning to impose on our blessed Lord, who neither needed this deceiver's memento, to bring the scripture promises to his remembrance, nor his advice, when, and how to apply to them for the encouragement of his faith and hope in God ; and therefore shews him, that he understood the design of his suggestion, and the fallacy of the argument, by which he endeavoured to support it, by quoting another passage of sacred writ, which explained the true meaning of that, which the tempter had perverted and abused, and carried in it an absolute refusal to comply with the proposal that he made him. *Jesus said unto him, it is written again : Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God* *. Our Lord refers to the words of

* Deut. vi. 16.

Moses to the Israelites, when he says to them : *Ye shall not tempt the Lord thy God, as ye tempted him in Massah ; where they tempted the Lord, saying : Is the Lord amongst us † ?* They wanted water, and through their impatience for it cried out with indignation against Moses : *Wherefore is this, that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children, and our cattle with thirst ?* Is this a sign, that the Lord is amongst us ? If he be, let him now give us a proof of it, by furnishing us with water for ourselves and our cattle. So that to tempt God is to put him to the proof of his power and goodness, to demand it from him for our own satisfaction, and to prescribe to him the time and means of giving it. If therefore our blessed Lord had, in compliance with the tempter's proposal, thrown himself from the temple, depending on God's giving his Angels charge over him, to bear him up, and prevent his being crushed by the fall, it would have been *tempting God*, and putting him, without any direction and order from him, to the trial, whether he would or could deliver him. It was venturing upon a rash, unwarrantable action, and prescribing to God to prevent the destructive effects of it, by the immediate interposition and care of his Angels. But thus to tempt, and prescribe to God, and put him to the proof of his power and goodness is real insolence and impiety, and so far from being a

† Exod. xvii. 2, 7.

rational instance of trust and confidence in God, as that it is a very high and criminal presumption and folly. And as this is expressly forbidden by God, it is the most certain method to forfeit his protection, and no other consequence can be reasonably expected, but our being left to reap the fatal effects of our own insolence and folly. And therefore our blessed Saviour gives the tempter to understand, that his deference and regard to the scriptures was the very reason why he refused to comply with his proposal, backed by the scripture; because as the word of God forbids us to tempt him, by putting him to unnecessary proofs of his power and goodness, he therefore could not, consistent with the duty he owed him, venture upon so rash and desperate an action; because that would be to throw himself into the extreamest danger, without any reason or necessity, merely to put God to the trial, whether he would or could preserve him. And thus ended the second trial, in the compleat victory of our blessed Lord over this practised and experienced seducer. But he was not to be thus silenced, nor his malice thus easily satisfied. He hath yet a farther resource, and one more experiment to make of our Saviour's constancy and resolution. And therefore,

III. Thirdly, *the devil takes him up into an exceeding high mountain, and shews him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, and says to him: All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.*

But in this also he was as unsuccessful, as in the former two ; for *Jesus said to him : Get thee hence Satan, for it is written : Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.* To set this in as clear a view as I can, I would observe :

That the expression of the tempter's *taking Christ into an high mountain*, is the very same, word for word, with that which this Apostle uses on another occasion, and where no interpreters find any thing extraordinary and miraculous ; viz. where he tells us, *that Jesus takes Peter, James and John his brother, and brings them up into an high mountain* * ; i. e. went himself thither and ordered them to follow him ; took them with him as his companions to attend him, and be witnesses to the glory of his transfiguration. No one ever here imagined that Christ miraculously conveyed them through the air to the top of this mountain, or carried them there any otherways than on their feet. Nor doth the expression convey any other meaning, or is capable of any other interpretation but this. And therefore in the place before us, the tempter took our blessed Lord into an high mountain in the same sense, by leading him thither, going before him, and by God's permission constraining him to follow him ; or by persuading and pressing him to accompany him, which our blessed Lord complied with, by the secret direction of that spirit of God,

* Mat. xvii. 1.

which

which he had just received at his baptism, and under whose influence and conduct he continually acted. This is the easy and the natural interpretation, and hath no difficulty attending it. *Where* this mountain was, I am not knowing enough to determine. Our blessed Lord was baptized in *Jordan*, and 'tis probable the wilderness into which he was led, was somewhat beyond, but *near that river*, as there were several of them towards *Arabia Petræa*. And when *Moses* prayed, that God would permit him to go over *Jordan*, that he might see the promised land, God would not permit him, but ordered him to go up to the top of *Pisgah*, from whence he had a very fine and extensive view of it; and 'tis not improbable, that this was the very hill to which our Saviour was led, where he might have that pleasing prospect, by which the tempter intended to ensnare and destroy him, by exciting his ambition, and kindling in him a strong desire after temporal grandeur and ambition. But whatever the mountain was, or wherever situated, when our Lord was stationed on it, it is farther remarked :

That the tempter shewed him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, and as St. Luke adds, *in a moment of time* *. Every one here sees, that these words, *He shewed him all the kingdoms of the world*, if they are to be understood of their being so shewn to

* Luke iv. 5.

him, as that he could see them with his bodily eyes, are not to be interpreted *literally*, nor in the *full extent* of the expression ; since no human eye can take in so large a prospect, could there be any point in the world, in which all those kingdoms could lie in prospect, and much more because such a view is rendered absolutely impossible by the *globular form* of the earth ; and therefore some have imagined, that this evil spirit raised up, in the *imagination of Christ*, in an instant of time, some kind of picture and prospect of the kingdoms of the earth, and the glory that attended them, and so made a fictitious representation of what he could not really make him behold. But this is not agreeable to what the history affirms, which speaks of what he *really skewed him*, and not what he deluded him with a false and shadowy view of ; and is a scheme which offers so many objections to my mind, as that I cannot easily digest it.

There are two words by which *Matthew* and *Luke* express, what we render the *world*, neither of which lead us necessarily to understand the *whole world*, or globe of the earth, but which hath each a more confined sense, and denote some particular province, country, and kingdom of the earth ; and by way of distinction, either the *Land of Canaan*, or at other times the *Roman Empire*. Thus 'tis said, that God gave the promise to Abraham, that he should be *the heir of the world*, i. e. of the
Land

Land of Canaan *. Thus also *Augustus Cæsar* ordered that *all the world should be taxed*, i. e. the provinces of the *Roman Empire* †. In this *limited* sense, the tempter shewed our blessed Lord all the kingdoms of the earth, gave him a view of *some parts* of the *tetrarchies*, *kingdoms*, and *provinces*, that lay extended before him, and which were subject to the dominion of the *Romans*. And it is to be remarked, that the prospect which *Moses* had before him, from the top of *Pisgah*, was exceeding extensive and wide, towards all the four corners of the world, as it is described in the last chapter of *Deuteronomy*. So that as this view presented itself at once to our blessed Lord, and the tempter pointed out to him *Judea*, with some of the neighbouring districts, and shewed him the fruitful plains, the fertile hills, the populous cities, towns and villages, the stately houses and palaces, the countries abounded with ; he might well be said to shew him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory thereof, *in a moment* or instant of time ; as the *prospect*, whatever it was, was *instantaneous*, and offered itself to his view, as soon as ever he was in the station fixed on for that purpose, and could survey the several objects that were around him. Especially, as I apprehend, that the shewing here spoken of, relates rather to *description*, than by ocular sight ; in which sense the word is frequently used, both in sacred and

* Rom. iv. 13. † Luke ii. 1.

profane writers. Thus St. Paul to the *Corinthians* : *I shew unto you a more excellent way* †, i. e. I inform you of it, and describe it to you. And thus when our Lord from the top of the mountain, beheld such a variety of countries before him, and had the pleasing view of their fertility, riches, and cities before him, the tempter seems to have shewn him *the kingdoms of the world*, by pointing to the situation of others, too distant to be seen. Look towards the *East*. There is the *Persian* empire, and the kingdom of *Arabia*, with all its gold and frankincense and myrrh. Behold the *South*, there you may see where the *Egyptian* kingdom lies. In the *West* you are to look for *Tyre*, and the *Isles*, and *Rome* itself, the head of the universe. Towards the *North* you'll see *Galilee* and *Syria* ; and then laying hold of the opportunity, gave him such a description of that grandeur and magnificence, that splendor and pomp, that plenty and riches, which the princes and kingdoms of the world possessed, and which were so much admired and envied by the generality of mankind, as he hoped would impress his mind, kindle in him the sparks of ambition, and induce him to pay to himself homage, as the sovereign Lord and Disposer of them. And it is evident that such an artful well wrought description and representation as this, added to the grandeur and beauty of the prospect before him, would heighthen the temptation, and

† 1 Cor. xii. 31.

carry in it much stronger influence and persuasion. And methinks this seems to be pointed out by the relation itself. For as Luke represents it, the tempter says to him, *all this power will I give thee, and the glory of them.* Power could not be seen, and the glory of kingdoms not beheld from a mountain. But if he had been *describing* the power and majesty of kings and princes, and the glory with which they were surrounded in their respective kingdoms; nothing could be more natural and proper than to add: All this power will I give thee and the glory of them. This was first to work up his imagination to its full height, and then artfully throw in the bait, that he might the more eagerly seize it, and the dazzling proposal be more readily complied with.

And this is what we are next to consider, *viz. the nature of the offer*, and wherein the *strength* of the temptation consisted. *All these things will I give thee*; all these kingdoms which thou hast now in prospect, or I have pointed out to thee, and the pomp and splendor that belongs to them. Or as *Luke*: All this power, and the glory of them, which thou hast partly seen, and I have fully described to thee. 'Tis evident that the tempter *suspected* him to be the *Son of God*, or promised *Messiah*, by the two former temptations, and it seems plain from this, that he had entertained the common opinion of the *Jews* concerning him, that he was to be a temporal prince, and probably thought, that by conquest

conquest and victory over the nations he might destroy idolatry, and proselyte them to the Jewish religion. And in this view the offering him the throne of *Israel*, and the kingdoms of the neighbouring nations, and persuading him to lay hold on the present opportunity to appear as *King of Israel*, and attempt the conquest of the kingdoms around *Judea*, was worthy his craft and subtlety. Otherwise, it will be hard to account for his making him this promise, if he had no apprehension of his being born to the inheritance of them. The ancient *prophecies* concerning the Messiah were, *that to him should be the gathering of the nations, and that he should have the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession.* To these prophecies the tempter probably was no more a stranger than to other parts of scripture; and therefore willing to be before hand with God Almighty, or rather desirous to frustrate his intentions, he offers to put our Saviour into possession of them; well knowing that if he held them by grant from him, he could have nothing to fear from his dominion and power; or hoping, that if he should be tempted through ambition to accept his offer, God would never permit him to obtain them, and that hereby the scheme of destroying his own kingdom by the Messiah's advancement, would be intirely frustrated. The performance of his promise he little regarded. The object he aimed at was the seducing our Lord, which if he could but happily for himself accomplish,

plish, he hoped every thing else would succeed to his wishes.

But least our Lord should suspect his power to make these glorious assurances good, he adds, as St. *Luke* relates it : *All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them ; for that is delivered unto me, and to whomsoever I will, I give it.* An ill compliment this, to the kings and princes of the earth, that they hold their dominions by the grant of this evil spirit. But how true soever it may be, as to the *tyrants* and *oppressors* of the earth, who come to enlarge their dominions, and govern their subjects by the criminal measures of fraud, and violence and murder ; yet the assertion, in the general manner in which 'tis made, is false, and worthy *the father of lies*. For the kingdoms of the earth are under the disposal of God, and this evil spirit, instead of giving them to whom he will, can give them to none, without the permission of God. However, truth was not the thing intended, but to make the offer tempting, and if that could be done by lies and falshood, it would not be in the least scrupled by this insidious deceiver. Any method was equal to him, provided he could secure the event he aimed at. However, the boast seems to be founded on that very antient opinion, which hath a great deal of countenance from the sacred writings, viz. that the *kingdoms of the earth* had each their *guardian angel*, who presided over the respective affairs of them, and had a sort of sovereignty within their own provinces. And
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if, as some have, not without reason, supposed the tempter took on him the form and character of the *guardian Angel of Judea*, he might say with some propriety: It is delivered unto me: This is the province committed more immediately to my care, and which I can give to whomsoever I will. But there was a condition annexed to this promise of putting Christ into the possession of these kingdoms, and the glory of them; and that was,

If thou wilt worship me, all shall be thine, as Luke; or as 'tis in Matthew: All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. This appears a most *extravagant and insolent* demand, for the evil spirit to ask the Son of God to worship him; and it was so unquestionably considered in itself; and it would have been as extravagantly weak as wicked a proposal, had the *tempter* appeared *as himself*, or imagined that Christ suspected or knew him to be the person he really was. But supposing he personated a *good Angel*, and took on himself the appearance of the Angel of God's people, there could be nothing extravagant or shocking in the proposal, upon the principles of the Jews themselves, nothing but what even a good man might do, and what in former times they had actually done. For they esteemed the worship of angels a right and commendable thing, and imagined it an instance of respect and veneration that was due to them. And though he demanded our Saviour to *prostrate himself* before him in token

token of homage and adoration, yet that was no more than what was constantly practiced, all over the East, by subjects to their princes, or by inferior princes to those by whose authority they held their dominions. And therefore the evil spirit promises our Lord the kingdom of the Messiah, upon a condition, against which a *Jew* would have had no objection, with respect to a *good angel*, viz. the *prostrating himself* in his presence; and if our Lord, by paying him this acknowledgment and homage, would own him to be *Lord Paramount*, and disposer of the kingdoms under his charge, and which he governed as his province, he makes him an offer of all, and to put him into possession of his largest ambition.

But here also the tempter's subtlety and malice *fail'd him*, and he finds himself fully discovered and repulsed. For our blessed Lord with indignation and authority rebukes him, and says: *Get thee hence, Satan, or get thee behind me, Satan, for it is written: Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.* It is remarkable, that in the two former temptations our Lord *calmly* replies to the suggestions that were made him, without discovering to his tempter that he knew him. And the plain reason seems to be, because what he prompted Christ to do, carried in it some *semblance* of doing honour to God, as it was persuading him to exercise a remarkable trust and confidence in his power and goodness. But as the *present* suggestion was an act
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of immediate *impiety* against God, and to acknowledge by prostration and worship another disposer of the kingdoms of the earth besides him ; our Lord rejects it with abhorrence, and with an authority and anger becoming the Son of God, says to him, *Satan, thou adversary of God and man : Get thee hence.* “ This insolence I will no longer endure. Depart from my presence, and know I understand my duty too well, to pay thee, or any creature, the worship thou demandest ; for ’tis written : *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.*” Had our Lord bowed himself before him, as the condition of receiving the kingdoms of the earth from him, it would have been an act of *homage* to him, as the *God of this world* ; which would in reality have been to countenance his rebellion and apostacy from God. And therefore by quoting this passage of scripture, *Him only shalt thou serve*, our Lord not only rejects his offer and the condition of it, but lets him know also, that the *power* he claimed of disposing the kingdoms of the earth was *vain* and *presumptuous*, that the *Lord only was God*, that he was *supream* over the armies of heaven, and the kingdoms of this world, and was therefore alone worthy to be worshiped and adored as the Sovereign of the universe, who orders all things according to the directions of his own will ; and for his presumption and impudence commands him instantly to depart, with an authority which he was not able to resist.

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And accordingly the Evangelists remark, that *the tempter immediately left him*, whilst the good angels came to congratulate him on his glorious victory, and *minister* to his wants.

The practical inferences from this subject of our Lord's temptations are so various, and of that importance to us, as that they deserve a particular consideration. But I shall now only observe : How much it becomes us, as the disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ, to *imitate his faith and constancy*, his firmness and resolution, in resisting and overcoming the temptations of life. He was tempted by the calls of appetite to improper gratification, and unseasonable indulgence ; by the love of reputation and fame, to purchase it by unwarrantable and unjustifiable methods ; by his very reverence for and trust in God, to rash expectations, and presumptuous confidence ; and by the spirit of ambition, and the prospect of empire, grandeur, riches and glory, to seek after them, without the leave, and contrary to the permission of God his heavenly Father. He was tempted under the guise of friendship, and with a pretended concern for his safety, prosperity and honour. His temptations were of long continuance, addressed to all the most prevalent passions of human nature, managed with great art and delicacy ; in the very critical season and circumstance, in which they were most likely to impress and influence him, and when every thing seemed to concur to render them effectual. But our Lord was not to be moved.
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He stood his ground, foiled the great adversary, and by his principles triumphed in an honourable and compleat victory. What are we to learn from hence, Christians? To be upon our guard, to *watch* our spirit, never hastily to listen to the suggestions of our appetites and passions, to *strengthen* our *principles*, to have them always *ready* for our assistance, and to resist every sollicitation to evil, whatever motives may be offered to us to persuade us to a compliance with them. Tempted to sin we may be, and probably every one of us have been, and shall be; but we need not be overcome. The victory over temptation is certain, if we will use the appointed means to obtain it. The very same method by which Christ endured, will render us invincible. The same spirit of God, under whose conduct he was, dwells in us, Christians, and by his aid, and under the lead and example of the great captain of our salvation, we shall be entirely conquerors, put to flight and to shame the great adversary of our souls, and nothing shall be able ever to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

SERMON

S E R M O N IX.

The Folly of casting off the Principles
of Religion.

PSALM xiv. 1.

*The Fool hath said in his heart, there is no God.
They are corrupt, they have done abominable
works, there is none that doeth good.*

'TIS a complaint frequent in the mouth
of religious and good men, that *infidelity*, as to all the great principles of religion,
greatly prevails in the midst of us, and we
are apt to look upon and bewail this apostacy,
not only as an argument of our great *degeneracy*, but as the *peculiar infidelity* of the
times we live in, and as what renders the
present generation much worse than the
former. But though the complaint is but
too just, that there is a growing disregard to
every thing of a serious and sacred nature;
yet the inference drawn from it, of the pecu-
liar badness of our own times above the
former, may not be agreeable to the truth of
history, and the experience of wise and ob-
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serving men in the foregoing ages of the world. As long ago as the times of *Job*, probably before *Moses*, there were impious men, who said unto God, *Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways* *. *What is the Almighty that we should serve him, and what profit should we have, if we pray to him? Is not God in the height of heaven? And behold the height of the stars, how high are they! How doth God know? Can he judge through the dark cloud? Thick clouds are a covering to him, that he seeth not, and he walketh in the circuit of Heaven* †: Expressions, that are at least a denial of all providence in God, and of all dependence on providence in men; and that represent all religion in practice, as an irrational and unprofitable thing. And in the *Psalms* we find frequent complaints of this nature, viz. of man's casting off all sense of and reverence for deity, and in consequence of it breaking through all the restraints of piety and virtue; and my text represents this as the state of the generality of persons in his own times. *The fool hath said in his heart there is no God. They are corrupt. They have done abominable works. There is none that doth good. And in the verses immediately following: The Lord looked down from Heaven on the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside. They are all together become filthy. There is none that doeth good, no not one.*

* *Job* xxi. 14, 15.† *xxii.* 13, 14:

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These words point out a very *general corruption* of principles and morals, at least ; so universal, as that few or none were to be found, who had escaped the infection of infidelity and vice. So that how bad soever the present times we live in, and how much reason soever we have to lament the defection both as to principles and morals, that seems to be spreading amongst us ; yet the caution of the *royal preacher* seems worthy our regard : Say not thou what is the cause that the former days were better than these ? For thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this †. *i. e.* The fact itself hath no foundation in truth ; or if it hath, thou wilt not easily be able to account for the reasons of it. In *all ages* there have been men of atheistical principles, and very immoral lives ; fools who have cast off all reverence for God, and lived without any regard to their dependence on, and final accountableness to him. *The fool hath said in his heart there is no God. They are corrupt. They have done abominable works, there is none that doth good.* Which words represent to us :

I. The *folly* of casting off the principles of religion.

II. The *consequence* of this folly. It leads to the most corrupt and dissolute practices.

I. These words represent to us, the *folly* of casting off the principles of religion. *The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God, and there*

† Eccles. vii. 10.

can be *no greater folly* in the world than to think or say so, *one instance only excepted*: The *believing* there is a God, and yet *living* as if there *was none*. If the atheist could prove his point, he would then have a kind of right, and full liberty to gratify his passions, and he would have no reason to govern himself by the restraints of religion, and could have nothing to fear from the consequences of his vices in a future world. But if there be a God, and the principles connected therewith are true, and we believe them to be true; *habitual vice* is the *extremest folly*, because the certain consequences of it are absolute misery and destruction.

The scheme of *atheism* is indeed the whole of it *folly*, and a contradiction to the most certain and evident principles, and hath nothing to support it but the most improbable, romantick, and self contradictory principles. The leading principle of it is, that *there is no God*; no eternal, infinitely wise, all powerful, unchangeably good being; possessed of all intellectual powers, and moral perfections; and that therefore there is *no providence* that concerns itself in the conservation, protection and government of the world in whole or part; no being to whom man stands in any relation as creator, preserver, father, friend, inspector or Lord, from whom he hath any thing to fear or hope, to whom he owes either reverence, gratitude or love, to whom he stands obliged for his being or well being; to whom he can address his prayers

or praises, or from whom he can expect or receive any kind of good; and in consequence of this that he is under no law to him, and owes him no homage or obedience, to whom he is accountable, or from whom he shall ever receive either punishment or reward; *i. e.* that there is no future state, or world to come, no future judgement, no Heaven, no Hell; and, in a word, that all the principles of religion are false, and all the duties and practices of it are superstitious and absurd. These are the consequences that attend this leading principle of atheism, that there is no God. The denial of this one truth implies a denial of all the other truths arising out of and connected with it.

And this the Psalmist tells us is the language of a fool's heart. *He hath said in his heart there is no God.* It seems they were not arisen to that height of impiety, as *openly* and avowedly to deny the being and providence of God; but *their actions* carried in them a plain denial of these truths, and therefore he reasonably concluded, this was their inward sentiment, what they endeavoured to persuade themselves to believe, and what they were sometimes apt to think and hope might be true.

It hath been doubted by many, whether there ever was, or whether 'tis possible there can be a *speculative atheist* in the world, *i. e.* one who is really convinced, and that firmly believes there is no God. 'Tis a difficult matter to determine what really passes in mens breasts. There have been unquestionably

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some, who have in words openly and expressly denied it. 'Tis uncertain whether this proceeded from the firm persuasion of their minds, but absolutely certain, that if it did, that persuasion could arise from no rational and moral conviction; because *'tis impossible to prove*, and therefore impossible to be certain *that there is no God*. When men have an interest to answer by rejecting the principles of religion, they will try every art and practice with themselves, to persuade themselves out of the belief of them; and I am apt to think they may sometimes so impose on themselves, and so far subdue their consciences, as that for a season, they may quite get rid of all apprehensions and fears of deity, and settle into a *temporary* atheism. But I do not apprehend that 'tis easy or common, absolutely to get rid of these apprehensions of God. The suggestions of conscience, and the thousand arguments that prove his being, and the suspicion that he doth exist, I imagine, will return in the intervals of reflection and consideration, and not leave him in quiet and uninterrupted possession of the atheistical scheme he hath endeavoured to establish in his own mind. And besides this, men may, by habitual vice, and a long course of wickedness, bring themselves to such an inattention, irreverence, and disregard towards the being, perfections and providence of God, as that if they can't be said formally to have got rid of the belief of Deity, they may be said to be wholly dispossessed of *all manner of fear of Deity*.

Deity, and to be no more influenced by any motives that relate to him, than if they had wholly renounced his existence. And this disregard to deity may in time grow so absolute and intire, as to come little short of atheism itself, and as may be reasonably construed to be a real profession of his belief that there is no God.

'Tis certain, that habitual sinners and profligate men can be *safe* in their practices upon no other scheme but that of *atheism*; and if they cannot prevail with themselves to break off these by repentance, and return to religion and virtue, they will do every thing to render themselves easy in that course they are determined to pursue; and amongst other methods, they will not fail by false reasonings and specious objections, to endeavour to impose on, and deceive themselves into a persuasion of the truth of what they wish to be true. And as we see often in fact, that there is nothing so absurd but what persons may be induced for a while to credit, especially when inclination and interest prompts them to it; so I do not know, but that for a season at least, they may prevail with themselves to sink down into and embrace that, which is of all opinions the most absurd and ridiculous, that there is no God; and bating occasional interruptions of this belief, from the suggestions of conscience not wholly wasted, some occasional events in life, carrying in them strong marks and clear intimation of a providence, and from the visible footsteps of Deity evidently im-

pressed on the whole frame of the creation, occurring to their minds, in spite of all their endeavours to avoid and resist the force of them ! I say excepting such temporary interruptions as these, I know not, but their disbelief of Deity may become habitual and settled, and then they may wholly divest themselves of all thoughts and apprehensions as to the divine Being, perfections and providence. For I cannot think it less possible for men to come to this height of impiety, and embrace the absurdest imaginations of atheism, than it is for them to do what is more absurd and impious, professing to believe a Deity, and yet *living* as if there was *none*. And as the Psalmist argued, from the vices and corruptions of those in his own time, to which he saw them indulge, that they *said in their hearts*, or were apt to persuade themselves, that there *was no God* ; so we may reason from the same causes in our own to the same conclusion. And indeed the impieties and vices that are now practiced by some amongst ourselves are so enormous, that one would be apt to imagine men could never commit them, unless they were as fully atheists in speculation as in practice. But this *their way is their folly*, whosoever may approve and imitate them. And this may be made appear by many plain and evident considerations. And I would observe,

- I. That the *casting off* all the great principles of religion, whether natural or revealed, is an *instance of folly*, because 'tis impossible

impossible in the very nature of the thing, ever to *disprove* them, or *demonstrate* their *falsehood*. If this could be done, atheism would have some plea, and might have reasonable persons to countenance and embrace it. But this can never be done. There are no self-evident, certain principles, by which this can be fully, or even probably shewn. That there is a God, a providence, a future state, a judgment to come, a retribution of rewards and punishments in another world; that there may be a person sent from God to instruct the world in knowledge and righteousness, and the belief of a future state, that he may endow him with a power of working miracles, raise him from the dead, and for reasons of the highest importance give him power to confer the most valuable blessings on mankind, and constitute him universal judge; these and the like propositions are incapable of being disproved, and the falsehood of them being made appear by any substantial and convincing evidence. I know objections may be raised against them, and so also there may be objections raised against the most certain and unquestionable facts and principles. But an *objection* to the truth of any thing is quite a different thing from a *demonstration* of its falsehood. To do this, it must be shewn, that they imply either a natural impossibility, or a contradiction to some certain, obvious, acknowledged principles of truth, or that they are repugnant and contradictory to each other, or may be reduced to a clear and plain absurdity. But

I. They

1. They *imply no natural impossibility*. That a being *infinitely more perfect* than we should exist, is no more impossible, than that *we should exist* in so much more perfect a state than a mite or worm; or that *he should be eternal*, any more than the *world*, or the *atoms* of which it consists, or something else should be eternal; because nothing could have been, if there had been nothing from eternity; or that there should be a *divine providence*, any more than that there should be *human foresight* or care; or that there should be a *future world*, any more than that there should be the *present one*; or that there should be a *future judgement* any more than that there should be a *present one*; or that the consequences of men's actions should overtake them *hereafter*, any more than that they do often overtake them in the *present* life; or that Christ should be an *instructor to mankind*, any more than that I should be *to you*, or *you* to one another; or that *miracles* should be done by God *through him*, any more than that God *should do miracles by himself*, and that greatest miracle of all, create the world, and all the various objects of it; or than that, which is a *greater miracle*, in the scheme of atheism, that the *world should create itself*, or be created without any creator, or exist without a cause, or exist from eternity, without one single reason of an eternal existence belonging to it. There is no natural impossibility, that any genuine principles of religion should be true. And

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2. There are *no certain maxims* to which the *principles of religion* are a *contradiction*. The being and providence of God contradict no original and clear perceptions and convictions of the mind, but fall in with and arise out of those primary notions and apprehensions. The *possibility* of a *future* state is just as certain as the *reality* of the *present* one, and 'tis no repugnancy to the consciousness that *I now am*, that *I may hereafter be*. That there should be future rewards and punishments is irreconcilable with no first principle of truth, but may be, as demonstrably, as that we are capable of them in the present state ; and the supposition of them carry no affront to reason, nor any contradiction to the condition and constitution of our nature ; but it is perfectly consistent with and entirely arises out of it. And upon supposition of the being of a God, it carries *no reflection* upon *his character*, and is contrary to no one single perfection of his nature, that *he should commission*, by peculiar instruction, one or more persons, as the circumstances of the world required, to make known his will, and recover men to virtue and religion ; any more than it doth, that he should *first give them reason*, or make men capable of informing one another, or instruct them by the works of nature, or lead them to consideration by the exercise of a constant providence ; or put them under the obligation of a natural law, or confer on them any one blessing whatever of nature or providence. Nor doth it imply the denial
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of any one single truth, that a person thus instructed of God, should be furnished with a suitable proof of his divine commission and authority, or be enabled to prove it by such extraordinary and miraculous works, as should point out the immediate finger and power of God. The *over-ruling* on extraordinary occasions the powers of nature, and the common course of causes and effects, is *as easy* as the *first settlement* of them, by him that settled them; and the doing this for wise reasons is as consistent as the original fixing of them for other wise reasons; and as the doing it doth not interrupt the general constitution of things nor introduce any disorder or confusion into the common course of nature; such a temporary and partial suspension of them is no reflection upon the fitness and wisdom of that original and general constitution, nor of levity, fickleness, and want of forecast in him that ordained it. And finally, that *one man* should be constituted a *mediator*, or medium of conveyance of any signal blessings to all men, and be advanced to be universal Governor and Lord, is no more repugnant to our plainest sense, and daily experience of things, than that God should constitute *one man on earth* to be a mediator or means of conveyance of any signal blessing to another, or to a family, or to a nation, or to several nations united under his government; or than that God should appoint, as he hath in fact appointed, all the great blessings of human life to be conveyed

veyed in private and publick life by the mediation of others. So that all the principles of religion, whether natural or revealed, are incapable of being disproved, as they can never be shewn to be repugnant to any original, certain, and indisputable principles of truth, to the constitution of human nature, or the common and universal experience of things; but are in fact entirely consistent with them, and indeed may be certainly demonstrated to be included in, and consistent with them. And

3. 'Tis as *impossible to shew any real contradiction* between the genuine principles of religion themselves, as to shew their repugnance to any original notions, or self-evident and unquestionable truths; and therefore as impossible to evidence and demonstrate their falshood. Contradictory propositions can never be both of them true. The certainty of the one demonstrates the falshood of the other; and if the great and genuine doctrines of religion were justly liable to the charge of inconsistency, some of them at least could have no foundation in truth, but would deserve to be rejected. But here we have no reason to fear for our religious principles, as they are all reconcilable, and in the most perfect concord and harmony with each other. The principles of *natural religion* are such, as are supposed to be the *mere genuine* certain dictates of *natural light* and reason; and as true reason can never dictate contradictions, those principles which are dictated

dictated by it, must for that reason be all of them reconcileable, and in all things consistent. Nor is the harmony less between those of *natural* and *revealed* religion, and one great end of the latter is to confirm and establish and enforce the former ; and by consequence the doctrines of both must be as consistent, as the distinguishing principles of either. And thus they will be found to be, upon the most careful examination. The *support* of religion and morality in the world, must be the *great design* of providence, and the promoting the ends of both is the governing intention of revelation ; and therefore in this view of it, it must have the warrant and support of all true principles of reason. The *means* of promoting these, as settled by revelation, are those which alone can with propriety be used, instruction, and persuasion, conviction and evidence, against which reason can make no just objection. The *doctrines* themselves, which revelation conveys the knowledge of, as peculiar to itself, and distinct from those of natural religion, are closely *connected* with, and *arise out* of those *natural principles* ; suppose their truth, and are impossible without it. Natural religion teaches us, that God who is the Author of our reasonable powers, and gave us our capacities for knowledge and perception, can as immediately convey the knowledge of his will by direct impressions on, and application to our intellectual powers, to any one or more persons, or to the whole of mankind,

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as immediately, by the operation of external objects and arguments. Revelation tells us that he hath done this ; and yet as reason assures us, that our intellectual powers were not given us in vain, nor to be rendered perpetually or generally *useless*, by supernatural and extraordinary impressions, and by miraculous conveyances of knowledge, so as to render insignificant the ordinary methods of effecting it ; herein revelation agrees with reason ; attempts no violence to men's powers, offers itself to their consideration, and leaves them to the common methods of drawing instruction and information from it. As *natural* religion teaches *the eternal and immutable difference* between moral good and evil, and that the true worship of God must be that of the heart, manifested by the fruits of a good life ; so *revelation establishes* both. As the one teaches and establishes the doctrine of a future state, so doth the other ; but with this difference, that revelation assures us that this future state shall take place by a real resurrection from the dead ; without which, even upon the principles of true philosophy, it doth not appear how men are ever to recover their proper natures, or as men be either rewarded or punished. Reason evidently teaches a future judgment, or what is equivalent to it, an equitable decision of men's future lot, according to their respective characters of good and evil. Revelation establishes this doctrine of a future judgment ; but then as reason teaches that God is absolutely

lutely invisible and therefore cannot in any visible shape or form preside personally in this great work, revelation assures us this judgment shall be carried on by a *visible president*, every way furnished with those intellectual and moral qualifications, as shall abundantly fit him for this high dignity and office. The same consonancy and mutual dependency might be shewn between all the distinguishing, real principles of natural and revealed religion; and therefore 'tis absolutely impossible to disprove the truth of either, by shewing them to be in any instance self-contradictory and repugnant. And therefore

4. Lastly, 'tis *impossible* to reduce them to an *absurdity*; because this can only be done by shewing them to be impossible in their nature, repugnant to plain and self-evident principles, or repugnant to one another, and destructive of themselves. And therefore it must be an argument of the greatest folly to reject the belief of them, and banish all regard to them out of our minds. For after a thousand objections that may be raised against them, the possibility of their truth and certainty still remains, and whilst this continues, 'tis stupidity and the excess of weakness to pronounce them false, or live so as if they were not, and could not possibly be true. And this will appear with farther conviction, if we consider

1. That the *casting off the principles of religion* and the embracing the scheme of atheism and infidelity, is a *contradiction to the*
general

general sense and reason of mankind, and stands condemned by the almost universal suffrage of the world. I am as sensible as any one can be, that there is oftentimes little regard to be paid to common opinions and vulgar notions, which are oftentimes nothing better than common prejudices, and vulgar mistakes; nor do I in the least measure truth, by the judgments which they pass on things, or the sentiments they form concerning them. But still, if any sentiments can be made appear to have been embraced from the earliest ages of the world, throughout all the various periods of its duration, amongst all nations in it, barbarous and polished, free or enslaved, learned or ignorant, and by infinitely the far greatest part of mankind in every nation, by those that have been the most inquisitive and sagacious, as well as by those who have little leisure for enquiry, by men of the highest abilities, as by those of the lowest, by the most excellent and virtuous of men, insomuch that Cicero *, who well knew the sentiments of his own and past ages, did not scruple to say, with respect to the soul's immortality, which supposes a God : *Nescio quo modo inbæret in mentibus quasi seculorum quoddam augurium futurorum ; idque in maximis ingeniis, altissimisque animis existit maxime, & apparet facillime.* And I may add, frequently by the most profligate and vicious, by men that have differed in ten thousand other specula-

* Tusc. Quæst. l. 1. c. 15.

tions, and embraced repugnant schemes of philosophy ; by men that have had the strongest enmities, and the deepest personal prejudices against each other ; in a word, by men who have been led by personal and publick reasons, by their prejudices and fears, by their interest and views of safety, wholly to deny their principles ; and by others who could embrace them, from nothing but conviction of their truth, certainty, and importance ; I say when this is the case, when principles come thus universally recommended, they certainly carry with them great authority, and deserve to be most seriously and impartially considered ; and the rejecting such principles is not only an opposition to vulgar opinions, but a contradiction to human nature itself, and to the light of reason in general. If it should be said, that by this way of arguing, the greatest absurdities of principle may be embraced, because these have been as universally espoused, and come recommended to us by the general approbation of mankind : I answer, that the cases are vastly different, and that though the general principles of religion have been the common belief of mankind, yet the absurdities attending them have not been every where the same, but been peculiar to this and the other nation, and the absurdities of some been ridiculed and rejected by others.

The general principles of religion are those of the being of one God, a providence, the natural difference of actions, and the rewards
and

and punishments of a future state. These principles were universally held. In these the general sense of mankind concurred, and their sentiments in those respects were uniform. What they differed about were the attributes, circumstances, modes and explication of these things. In these nations differed from nations, the vulgar amongst themselves; and wise men and philosophers from the vulgar. So that though the general sense of mankind, as to the principles themselves, was uniform, and is therefore a strong presumption in favour of the truth of them; yet the like presumption can never be argued in favour of their superstitions and absurdities of belief, because in these there was no unity, but a perpetual variety and disagreement. If it be said, that this unity and agreement of the principles was the effect of tradition from one age and generation to another, be it so: But then whence did it first come? How was it brought into the world? And what gave rise to it? If it was the natural effects of the reasonings of a mind, struck with the magnificence, variety, connection, marks of power, traces of wisdom, and various footsteps of goodness, that every where appear from the *effects of power to an almighty agent*, from the *signs of contrivance* and art to a *divine contriver* and artist, from the *tokens of goodness* to a *benevolent original*, and from the nature of the whole frame of things to a suitable and proportionable cause of them; and from these characters of the first cause reasoning farther

the certainty of providence, the moral government of God, and therefore the accountability of men to him, as their proper judge, and therefore the existence of a future state for the proper distribution of rewards and punishments; if this I say gave the first rise to the principles of religion, this is a strong recommendation of them, and a probable evidence of their truth; and as the general belief of them amongst all ages and nations hath been actually supported by these kind of arguments, it shews that the tradition hath thus universally prevailed, not by chance and accident, not by fraud and power, but by the appearance of such evidence to the minds of men, as that they have never been able to resist it, even when wholly free from all the wrong inducements and motives of force, or interest; even when they have been in the retirements of the closet, and have had nothing to bias them, or tempt them to a conclusion in favour of them, but the irresistible evidence of the things themselves, and the fullest conviction in their own minds and consciences in favour of them. Much more might easily be said on this head; but from what hath been already urged, I think it may be fairly inferred, that to treat these notions as merely imaginary and groundless, and to ridicule them as contemptible and absurd, when they have been in possession of mankind universally, throughout every period of their duration, and have been esteemed by the best and wisest of men, as the most venerable,

nerable, important and sacred truths ; is great presumption and folly ; and that the wholly rejecting them as false and imposture, is such an affront to the common sense and reason of mankind, as that none but they who are destitute of both can be guilty of. And this is a character more especially due to them, who take on them to censure, condemn, and run riot on these principles, whilst their passions are strong, and their reason weak and immature ? who have never been accustomed to severe enquiries, and laborious searches into the secrets of truth ; who have read but little, and studied less, and of whom by reason of their age, inexperience, want of time, and pursuit of pleasure, it may be certainly said : They are not masters of the subjects in which they pretend to decide, and whether their decisions are true or false, yet are in them precipitate and irrational. But farther,

2. The great *probability* of the truth of religious principles, yea the *demonstrative evidence* for the certainty of the capital leading ones, shews the extream folly of rejecting them, and wholly renouncing all belief of and regard to them. I have shewn you already, that to disprove them is in the nature of the thing impossible ; and 'till even this can be done, the treating them as absolute falsities is inexcusable, and betrays a very weak and wrong disposition of mind. But when 'tis farther added, that they are supported by the strongest probabilities, such as

in all other cases would be sufficient grounds of assent, and thought so by all impartial and equitable reasoners ; the folly of infidelity appears in a stronger light, and becomes in every view of it inexcusable. And the true strength of this probability will appear, if we consider, that all the foundation principles of it have demonstrative evidence to ascertain and support them, and may be proved by first principles, by indisputable, self-evident axioms of truth, by the intuition of our minds, and by the most certain experience that we universally have of our own state, and the condition of human nature. And these first principles, that are the basis and foundation of all religion, both in principle and practice, are these three : The being of a God, the essential and immutable difference of moral actions, and the capacity of being accountable for our own. The first of these hath been certainly demonstrated two ways : By the argument called *a priori*, or from the nature and reason of the thing itself, proving first the eternal principle or cause, and then descending to the operations and effects of it. And then from the argument *a posteriori* ; or arising from the evident effects and proofs of power, wisdom and goodness, in the formation and structure, and productions of nature, to an infinitely wise, powerful, and benevolent original, or cause of all things. The demonstration in each way is certain, and though it may be cavilled at, can never be evaded. That there is an essential difference of actions,

tions, between good and evil, we plainly discern by intuition ; or their difference appears at once to the mind, without any need of any intermediate idea or thought to ascertain or demonstrate it ; as incontestibly as the difference between the opposites in natural things, such as light and darkness, sweet or bitter, hard or soft, hot or cold, or any other contraries that can be named. And that all men have the capacity of being accountable, is as certain as that they think, can reason, are conscious, do remember, and are capable of choice. Thus far then we rest upon an immovable foundation of truth, that nothing can overturn and destroy. From the first of these principles, the being of a God, *i. e.* of a being infinitely powerful, wise, and good, immutable and every where present, the cause of all things, the universal Proprietor, and Lord of the creation, we immediately infer, universal providence, inspection, and government, suitable to the nature of every distinct being, and therefore managed with the greatest equity and justice. Hence it follows that if this providence and government be managed suitable to the distinct nature of every individual, *i. e.* suitable to the respective powers and faculties every individual is endowed with, the distinguishing powers of every being must be to him the rule of his conduct : That such as have only sense and instinct can be actuated by no other principles than those : And that reason, where that is implanted, is equally the rule of reasonable beings ;

beings : And that where sense and reason both enter into the composition, both have their proper province, and are to have their distinct influence on the conduct ; and that the lower and brutal principle of sense is to be kept in a constant due subordination to the higher and divine one of reason. Hence it follows, that as by our sense we discern, what is wholesome or noxious to the sensitive part of our frame, and are by this law of our nature to choose only that which is good, and tends to the preservation of it ; so by our reason we are enabled to discern what is good and evil in actions, or prejudicial or conducive to the welfare and happiness of our rational part, what results from our relations, connections, and stations of being, and to choose or refuse according to the dictates of this rational sense, or our inward convictions concerning these things ; and that to live by reason, as we are rational beings, is as truly and as universally the law of our nature, as to be governed by sense in all cases, that are immediately within the province of it ; and to subject sense to reason, because the welfare of the whole frame absolutely depends on it. Hence it follows, that as this difference of moral actions is as certain in itself, and as certainly discerned by all men, who do not wilfully shut out the clearest perceptions, as the difference in any objects that the senses are the judges of ; it must be the will of God that formed us, that we should govern ourselves by that reason he hath given us, attend
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to the moral sense he hath implanted in us, chuse according to our natural perceptions, pursue that course that certainly appears wise and good, and always do those things which the mind discerns to be lovely, excellent, amiable, and good, suited to our relations, and conducive to our perfection, welfare and happiness, and that we should avoid every thing that is contrary hereto. Hence it follows, that God, who hath formed our natures, fixed our relations, given us both our natural and moral sense of things, and who by the immensity of his nature, and the perfection of his knowledge, doth and cannot but constantly observe us, must approve or disapprove us, as we act agreeable or contrary to the constitution of our frame, and the law of our nature. But what is approbation and disapprobation without effect? What is government without rewards and punishments? What is wisdom, without wise distributions? What justice, where there is no just and equitable retributions? What the love of rectitude, without encouragements of it? What encouragement of it, without rewarding it? What is hatred of sin, without displeasure against it, and what displeasure, without the proper fruits and effects of it? Hence arises, from the nature of things, the high probability, the strong presumption, the irresistible conclusion of an impartial judgment; made more certain by the accountable nature of man, the principles of consciousness and self-reflection, and the sense he
hath

hath of the good or evil of his own actions ; and rendered indisputable by the sure information and evidence of divine revelation. Hence follows the certainty of a future state, and a life to come, as there is no proper judgment, no impartial award, no discriminating marks of pleasure or displeasure, to the good or bad ; a principle, that natural reason almost demonstrates the certainty of ; it being impossible to consider the nature and character of God, and the rational powers and accountable condition of man, without falling into this conclusion ; that as God doth not here, he will certainly hereafter judge all men in righteousness, and impartially distribute to every one according to his deeds. And as this is one of the fundamental principles of divine revelation, it stands upon such a foundation of truth and certainty, as carries the most clear and forcible conviction. Now in this connection and view of things, how foolish, how contemptibly foolish doth atheism appear ? To argue against the being of God, is arguing against demonstration itself ? 'tis opposing the most certain and indisputable truth, and rising up in opposition to the strongest evidence that can be brought for the proof of it. None but a weak man can do this. 'Tis equally ridiculous as reasoning against the existence of light at mid day, or the warmth of the sun beams when we actually feel them. And though men may think themselves wonderfully wise by opposing certainty and demonstration,

stration, yet with wise men the endeavour will always be treated with the sovereign contempt it deserves. And as all the other principles of religion, both natural and revealed, stand so closely connected with this original foundation one, that even this must be rendered uncertain, without these others are true; as every conception of God must be partial and dishonourable, that doth not include the characters of Inspector, Governor, Judge, and final Rewarder; the doctrines of providence, a future state, a final judgment, and the distributions of rewards and punishments, must appear to every impartial mind in the light of demonstration, or with such an high degree of probability, as tells little or nothing short of it. And if men divest themselves of these principles, cannot or will not discern the evidence of them, nor acknowledge or submit to the power and influence of them, 'tis not because too much knowledge or learning have made them bad, but because they have too little to discern the truth, or not integrity enough to own and yield to it. Again,

The *absurdities, contradictions, and impossibilities*, that must necessarily take place upon the scheme of *atheism*, are a farther demonstration of the great folly of rejecting and discarding the genuine principles of religion. There is nothing more frequent in the mouths of unbelievers than the charge of credulity, bigotry, implicit faith, and superstition, upon all those who profess to believe, and live by religious

religious doctrines and rules. They all of them to a man, if their censures be true, believe contradictions, and swallow down the grossest absurdities ; and there is nothing so contrary to reason, and opposite to common sense, that they will not embrace, and give the firmest assent to. It is but decent and modest however, that they who make and throw such charges on others, should be of all others the most rational and consistent in their scheme of principles, and liable to no charge of gross absurdities, and embracing a system consisting of a thousand contradictions. And yet upon comparison it will appear, that credulity lies on the side of infidelity, and that in this scheme they must avow the most evident and palpable inconsistencies ; infinitely greater than can with any justice be charged on the friends of religion and virtue. With respect to the origin of all things, what is a Christian's belief ? Why that there was an infinitely perfect, active, intelligent cause, existing from eternity, to whose agency, wisdom, and power, all beings owe their existence. And this is evidently assigning a cause proportionable and adequate to the effects produced, and doth not at least appear at first view to be so very romantick and incredible an absurdity. Well, but the wise man of whom the Psalmist speaks, says there is no God ; no such infinitely wise, powerful, and good Being that we suppose. What doth he place in the room of him ? Even the scheme of atheism won't do without allowing somewhat eternal. And
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to what doth atheism allow this glorious privilege of eternal existence? To the world in its present form? No, this they see is too absurd to be defended. What then? Why to atoms, small particles of matter, indivisible in their nature, and which were the original primitive seeds of which all things were afterwards formed. If it is asked, what was the employment of these atoms during their eternal existence; they answer us, they were dancing in the infinity of space, and undergoing infinite changes of situation and place; though without any internal or external principle of direction, and absolutely unconscious of existence, motion, and power. If it be asked, how these atoms came to make a world, and unite into the present system of things that we behold, we are told: That after the infinite alterations, as to motion and place, which these atoms underwent during the eternity of their existence, they at last united themselves into all the present various combinations and forms in which we now behold them. If through our wonder and surprise we should ask, how these combinations came to take place, Whether by any superior direction and agency? They tell us, No, for that would be to own a God. What, by chance? Some say, yes, and othes no; assigning not chance, but necessity as the cause of all things. When they are asked, what chance or necessity is, they answer: A cause that acts without consciousness and intention. When asked, whether this cause exists within every atom, or
without

without them, the answer must be, not without them, for that would be to suppose a cause existing, independent of and superior to them, which would be dangerous to them, and lead to the existence of a believer's God. If this cause be in the atoms, doth it exist in every individual one, or only in the whole of them? If not in each, but in the whole body of them, did it exist as a cause in them from eternity, or just from any given period of that eternity? If from eternity, why did not the present frame of things exist from eternity? Why was it not co-eval with the cause that at last produced it? Why did not this chance or necessity operate and exert itself infinite ages before it actually did? If it could not exert itself 'till these atoms came into such a particular given situation, then this internal cause did not exist in them from eternity, and so could never be a cause of the existence of the world at all; for on all schemes the cause of the world must be strictly everlasting. Besides, how came the whole system of atoms to be endowed with this internal power of chance or necessity, that was not in each individual? This is the absurdity of supposing that the whole is different from its parts, or that mere motion and difference of situation can produce new powers and properties in matter. If every individual atom of matter contains within itself this power or unconscious cause, how came they without design to unite? What must we suppose another cause to cause these infinitely various causes to unite? This will

will bring us to an original cause again, *i. e.* to God, the universal cause, which destroys the whole scheme of atheism. The union of such an infinite variety of causes, without intention, design and contrivance, to produce one regular, consistent, connected world, and without the superior direction of an infinitely wise and powerful agent, is an infinitely greater miracle than ever was believed by the most credulous Christian ; or rather an absurdity or contradiction too palpable and gross ever to be embraced by any other, but the *fool, who says in his heart there is no God.* For what doth he say by affirming this ? Why, that an infinitely various number of contradictory principles, powerless, unconscious, roaming through the immensity of space, that had existed in eternal disorder, furiously contending with each other, repelling, attracting, descending, rising, jostling, uniting, separating, and in a state of a perpetual, restless discord, come at last by some fortuitous, happy jumble, to fall into union, harmony and order, and thus to strike out this amazing uniform frame of things, and combine into a system of themselves, of constant, regular, uniform causes and effects. That is, that discord produced union, confusion order, chance design, senseless atoms a regular world, unconscious principles the most exquisite and beautiful productions, unthinking matter all the powers of perception and reason ; that the effects of wisdom, contrivance and skill had no proportionable and adequate cause ; in a word,

word, that the present frame of the world was not eternal, and that it was not even produced in time; but came into being by an inexplicable necessity or chance, *i. e.* by causes that had no power, thought, contrivance, design, or any one single qualification to render them the causes of the effects they produced. And is not this an hopeful scheme? Can any man help admiring the sagacity and consummate wisdom that appears in it? Or rather can any thing be more despicably contemptible? And are these the men, who charge believers with credulity? and reproach them with the belief of contradictions and absurdities? If we follow them farther, we shall find them uniform to themselves, and not afraid of embracing the most credulous suppositions. If there be no God, of consequence there can be no inspection and superintendency of providence. To what then in their scheme is the constant regularity of nature owing? What keeps her regular and uniform in her productions? Why doth not she dissolve, and fly off into her original atoms? Why doth not she change her present form and enter into different combinations of things? Why now we shall be told of nature, and nature's operations, and her regular course, and fixed order. But what is nature? according to them she is nothing but a composition of atoms; and the question returns: How this composition of atoms subsists? A true theist, a well instructed christian hath the proper answer ready. 'Tis by
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the superintending power, and constant direction of his providence, who first settled the order of nature. In the other scheme all that can be answered is, fate or chance ; which is no answer to the question, since both are senseless names, which they that make use of them can give no rational and satisfying description or definition of. So that atheism supposes, that matter and motion preserve themselves, though they have neither consciousness or power to do it ; that matter operates in infinitely various productions, by certain fixed laws of which it is insensible, and by which therefore it is impossible it should direct itself ; and that it necessarily operates by these, though the necessity be neither self imposed, nor imposed by any external agent or power. So that we have still marks of power without a powerful agent, steady direction, without internal or external power of direction, contrivance, without consciousness, art, without design, and the most astonishing proofs of skill, without any thing of wisdom, and innumerable proofs of a superintending providence, though in reality there be no providence at all. Agreeable to these absurdities they proceed farther, and in consequence of casting off the belief of God and his providence ; they farther believe, that man hath no former or maker, his constitution and frame is absurd, self-contradictory, and made absolutely in vain ; that all his powers and capacities for knowing, worshipping, adoring, loving, and serving of God, are waste and

useless ; that though he is formed for worship, 'tis impertinent and ridiculous ; that though he hath fears and apprehensions of deity, they are groundless and absurd, that though he can demonstrate a God, the demonstration is false, and not to be trusted to ; though he can prove a providence, the proof deceives him ; and though he hath a thousand probabilities to convince him of a life to come, and to render him thoughtful of the consequences of it, yet all these notices are vain and delusive, and that he ought never to think of what he can never put out of his mind, nor pay any regard to the most important suggestions and fears of his own breast. Besides these evident absurdities, they are forced to form the most uncertain and groundless suppositions, that have no proof, and are incapable of all proof : *viz.* that nothing exists but matter, that there is no spirit in the universe, that every man is mere material mechanism, that the whole of man is mortal, that he can exist no where but in the present world, nor in any other manner than in his present condition ; that death dissolves his frame, and annihilates the whole of his existence. These are very important hypotheses, and to the proof of them require something more than positive assertion, and the confident assuming determinations of the greatest pretenders to science and wisdom. If the being of a God be allowed, and the acknowledgment of it extorted by the irresistible force of evidence ; the folly of throwing
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ing off the belief of the principles connected with it is still more amazing and contemptible. For see, to believe a God without a providence, is to believe a God without wisdom or agency. To believe a providence that doth not regard the actions of men, is to believe a providence without government, and without that inspection which is the noblest end of providence. To believe a divine inspection that is attended neither with approbation or disapprobation of human actions, is to believe an inspection that makes no distinction, and that confounds the natures and differences of things. To believe that God doth approve or disapprove the actions of men, as they are good or bad, and yet that he will not reward and punish them, is to believe that his government is less perfect than that of men, and that he is defective both in equity and wisdom. And to believe that God will reward and punish, without believing a future state and judgment, is to believe that he will reward and punish, without conferring the one, or inflicting the other, since 'tis certain that these rewards and punishments do not take place generally in the present world. These and others like them are the absurdities to which the cause of atheism is driven, and I am not afraid to leave every man of sense and reason to pass the proper judgment on them. None but fools can believe these absurdities, and I think nothing but vice corrupt any man to believe them. Treat therefore these absurdities with the

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contempt

contempt they deserve. Shew yourselves men by yielding to the evidence of divine truth, and let nothing deceive you out of these principles, which firmly believed, and made the rule of your conduct, will guide you into innocence, integrity and an universal propriety and dignity of conduct in the present life, secure you the most refreshing comforts of your being, give you courage in the last moments of life, and secure you all the advantages your hearts can desire, or God can give in a more perfect and durable existence.



S E R M O N

S E R M O N X.

On keeping the Heart.

PROVERBS iv. 23.

*Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it
are the issues of life.*

THE government of the *heart*, or the due regulation of the *various passions*, which have as it were their rise from, and their seat in it, is of the utmost consequence to the peace of our minds, and the wise and regular conduct of our lives. The utility and necessity of it, hath been acknowledged and inculcated by the best and wisest of the *moral* writers of the *heathen* world. “ Govern, saith one of them †, thy mind or heart. Unless it be taught to obey, it will imperiously command. This, this therefore restrain with bridles and chains.” Nothing is more frequent in the morals of the *Roman* Philosopher than the maxim, that the *appetites* should

† Horat. Epist. l. i. Ep. 2. v. 62, 63.

submit to *reason*. "The instinct or force, saith he *, of the mind is double. The one belongs to the appetites, which hurry men away to this or that indifferently. The other belongs to reason, which teaches and explains to us, what we are to do, and what we should avoid. Hence it is necessary, that reason should preside, and appetite be made to obey." Many passages of like nature may be produced from the same excellent author, and almost every other, that hath written upon the subject of morality. 'Tis frequently inculcated by divine *revelation*. And indeed there is no maxim that hath been more universally known or inculcated by sacred and prophane writers, than this of *watching of our hearts*, or *keeping* under perpetual restraint or government, all the *various passions* of our nature, *because out of them are the issues of life*.

You will remember that in this exhortation of my text, the *heart* is represented as a kind of *citadel* or fortress, on the keeping of which our entire safety depends. If we surrender it to those enemies, that are continually labouring to get possession of it, and give the government of it out of our hand; disorder and ruin will necessarily ensue, our liberty will be soon lost, our best riches plundered and destroyed, and we shall be reduced to a state of the most abject slavery. And as the enemies of our happiness will be per-

* Cicer. de Offic. l. 1. c. 28.

petually endeavouring by fraud or force, to wrest it out of our hands, and reduce it into subjection to themselves; there is a constant necessity of vigilance and care to prevent the success of their attempts, and their having any kind of influence over, or share in the government of it. And here

1. We should so *keep our hearts*, or have that perpetual watch and guard over them, as to *secure the entrance of them* against all danger, and every attempt to invade them; that we may not through negligence or inadvertence admit and harbour any thing that may trouble or defile us. A fortress, how well so ever garrisoned, will easily be gained, and carried by surprize, if duty be not constantly done, and those who should watch and guard it, indulge to supineness and sloth, and are not ready upon every occasion to observe the motions of an enemy, and to secure all the avenues, by which they may approach and gain admission into it. A wise and prudent man will never suffer an enemy to come too near him, when he hath it in his power to keep him at a distance, and there is nothing more certain, than that it is much easier to *prevent* evil dispositions and affections from intruding themselves into our hearts, than after we have admitted them, and suffered them for a while to influence and govern us, to *dispossess* them of their power, and utterly to exclude them. Here the experiment is always dangerous, and generally fatal; and there have been innumerable instances of

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persons,

persons, who having unwarily put their hearts out of their own keeping, and thereby lost the government of themselves, have never recovered their freedom, nor been able to disintangle themselves from the snares they have been caught in, but who have been finally undone without redemption. The avenues to the heart should therefore be well guarded against all intruders, and the entrance barred.

Against *all evil imaginations and thoughts*, which are always bad and dangerous inmates, subtle, insinuating and deceitful, which, however pleasing they may appear, and whatever gratifications they may promise and lead to, yet Syren like, smile only to beguile us, and that they may allure us the more effectually to our own destruction. We should therefore, if possible, entirely exclude from our breasts, so as that they may never find any room there, *all thoughts dishonourable to God*, unworthy his purity, justice and goodness, that are subversive of the certainty, or injurious to the nature of his providence, that tend to *weaken our regard to the principles*, or *dis-affect* us to the *duties of religion*, that tend to inspire favourable sentiments of sin, and lessen the danger of committing it, that may excite lawless and criminal passions, or that may warm, aggravate and fix them; we should never admit fallacious reasonings to deceive us out of our principles, nor the pleas of appetite and passion to persuade us to act contrary to them; but to guard the eye, the ear,
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all the various inlets to imagination and thought, as may most effectually prevent their entrance, and carefully shun all such objects, connections, conversations, and occasions, as may tend to encourage and excite them. Or, if they suddenly arise in us, without our invitation and consent, as we sometimes find they will do, they should be immediately *cast out* with abhorrence, and the mind diverted to such other considerations, as may have the most direct tendency to dissipate and destroy them.

Imaginary wants, and *unnecessary appetites and desires*, are also very troublesome and dangerous guests, when admitted into the hearts of men, and when we suffer them to become motives and rules of action to us, without the necessary checks of reason and conscience. It was a noble answer of *M. Antonine* the emperor, as related by his successor *Julian* the apostate *; who being asked, wherein he thought the truest *imitation of the Gods* consisted, replied: "To want the fewest things, and to be most abundant in doing good to others." And indeed how many things are there that we do not really want, either for our comfort, usefulness and happiness! If indeed we judge by our passions, our wants will prodigiously multiply upon our hands. Fancy, vanity, pride, ambition, envy, and the love of pleasure, will make us uneasy in the absence of all those things

* *Juliani Cæs. p. 334. A.*

which

which are necessary to indulge them. This we shall want for dress and ornament, this for furniture and equipage, this for the plenty and elegance of the table, this to expend on pleasure and amusement, this to be upon an equality with our neighbour, and this to excel and overshadow him. I have no objection against men's endeavouring to prosper in the world, and their cherishing an honest ambition to rise as high as diligence and integrity can carry them : Only let them keep this ambition and desire under regular bounds ; not think this and the other thing necessary to happiness, not be uneasy in what they have, through an over anxiousness for what they have not, not pursue any measures of prosperity by means inconsistent with real prudence and integrity, not sacrifice their principles and religion to the world, nor suffer their desires after the plenty they are in quest of to be animated by the low, unworthy views only of more freely entering into the follies, amusements, gratifications, pleasures, customs, and manners of an unprincipled, thoughtless world, which never adds any thing to the real worth and dignity of character, make no one estimable in the sight of God, or of wise and good men, and is so far from contributing to any one's true felicity, as that it always endangers, and frequently finally destroys it. All such wants therefore as arise from mistaken opinions, from irregular affections, or irrational views and motives, should be utterly and forever excluded,

excluded, if we would consult our peace, secure our virtue, and obtain the possession of our real happiness.

It is farther highly incumbent on us, that we should *diligently watch* over our hearts, to *prevent any wrong habits* from being settled in us, and all dispositions to that which is evil, from having any power and influence over us. This is a care absolutely and universally necessary, on which the credit, comfort, and usefulness of this life, and all our hopes of a better in a great measure depend. Tendencies to evil in our natures there certainly are, and they arise from the very nature, and indifference of our passions, to all objects, without exception, that appear grateful to them. But these passions are generally *in the beginning easily governable*, and submissive to the proper restraints of reason and prudence, if they are not too early heightened by indulgence, and strengthened by frequent practice. It is by these means bad habits are contracted, and rendered inveterate and too frequently unconquerable. Generally speaking men have some *native reluctances* to criminal indulgencies, when they are first entering on a sinful course, and look with a kind of horror on those excesses of vice in which they see others madly plunging themselves. Nor do they oftentimes escape the remorse and reproaches of their own consciences, when first they venture on forbidden ground, break through the original restraints of education, and do violence to those principles

ples and sentiments of honour, modesty, and virtue, they once looked upon as sacred and inviolable. But by venturing on farther and farther, adding one transgression to another, and frequently suppressing the fears of offending, they grow more familiar with sin, the danger of it lessens in their minds, the consequences of it are kept out of their sight, the inclination to it grows stronger and stronger, all the motives to refrain from it become weak and destitute of all life and vigour, the very flow of their blood and spirits feels and nourishes the disposition to it, irregular imaginations inflame and quicken their desires, perpetual opportunities that offer themselves to gratify their passions, seduce and persuade them, and the powerful solicitations of their brethren in vice, and companions in iniquity, that have long deserted the path of uprightness, and walk in the ways of darkness, become so persuasive and prevalent, as that he hath no discretion to preserve him, no understanding to keep any watch over him. *He goes after them as an ox to the slaughter, or as a bird that hasteneth to the snare, i. e. without shame, wit, or fear, not knowing that it is for his life; or not considering, that it will end certainly in his destruction.*

By frequently indulging himself in these courses, the habit is contracted, and grows every day more powerful and absolute. Every thing gives way to the force of it. It controuls all other interests and views, and by hardening the conscience, by trampling underfoot

derfoot all considerations proper to resist it, and keeping intirely out of view all the fatal consequences that will attend it, it becomes impregnable by any of the regular forces of religion, maintains its usurped dominion over the soul, scorns all restraints, and draws men into the most complicated and aggravated crimes.

In such a disposition, under the cruel slavery of such habits, what hope, what prospect of redemption ! How improbable is the recovery ! How difficult is the cure ! If the fortress be thus in the hands of the enemy, and all the avenues of it in his possession, how shall we be able to oppose him ! When all the forces that should resist his power are oppressed, or intirely disarmed, how can we ever expel him ? How necessary, how unalterable must our subjection and slavery be ! Every one knows, that even as to trifling and indifferent things, an habit contracted by long use is very difficultly suppressed and broken. How much more so the habits of sin, which have so many peculiar circumstances to strengthen and confirm them, and when all the proper means to conquer and extirpate them are become impotent, or rather utterly destroyed. What God may think proper to do, by any extraordinary influence and grace, I cannot determine ; but I do not apprehend, that if any persons are resolved to enslave and destroy themselves, they have any great reason to expect, from the gospel revelation, that God will by miraculous interpositions prevent their

their slavery and ruin. 'Tis at least a presumptuous and dangerous expedient. But in the natural course of things, an habitual, hardened sinner, who, having extirpated all the natural good dispositions of his mind, and broken down all the original fences, that should have been his protection and security against the deceitfulness and power of sin, hath long indulged himself in presumptuous crimes, and thereby created in himself strong and unnatural and permanent propensities to that which is evil: I say, that such a person, judging of things according to moral probability, hath but little chance of ever becoming a real convert to religion and virtue; or in *St. Paul's* words, *of putting off the old man, which is corrupt according to deceitful lusts, and putting on that new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.* For in such persons the heart is so entirely corrupted and enslaved, the conscience so absolutely subdued, the sense of the difference between good and evil, so wholly effaced, and the mind so utterly blinded and steeled against all the consequences of a future state, as that there is almost nothing left in them which the motives to repentance can take hold of, and by which any kind of persuasions to reclaim them from their vices, and recover them to a better life, can become effectual. Hence it is that the scriptures represent the conversion of an habitual hardened sinner, as almost impossible. It is in this manner that the prophet represents the condition of the *Jews*, who had been long proficients

proficients in all manner of wickedness. *Can the Etbiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil* *. Not to signify, that the one is as impossible as the other, but the extreme difficulty of the thing, that a long accustomed sinner should ever be reclaimed and reformed by any of the ordinary means of conversion, and to prevent persons from contracting such habits as are, in the nature of things, so hard to be cured, and from the power of which there are but few who are intirely recovered, and gained over to the interest and practice of true religion and virtue. How much need therefore is there of a constant inspection over our hearts, that we may not suffer the passions of our nature to ensnare and seduce us into such criminal pursuits and gratifications, as may create and confirm in us the habit of sinning. This may be done by daily watchfulness and care, by keeping alive in our minds a becoming fear and horror of ever entering into the paths of vice, by immediately retreating from them, if unhappily we have been ever by surprise or persuasion inticed into them; by avoiding all those occasions that may inflame our passions, and endanger our safety; by shunning all familiarity and friendship with unprincipled and profligate offenders, and by continually habituating onrselves to those duties and services of life, that may employ our thoughts

* Jer. xiii. 23.

in a better manner, keep us out of the way of temptations and snares, and help to confirm us in all our wisest resolutions for the practice of righteousness. But then,

2. Farther, we should not only keep a constant watch over our hearts, so as to guard it against the entrance of every thing that may injure us, or endanger our safety, but so as to *inspect narrowly what actually passes in them*, and to become intimately acquainted with their real state, and habitual disposition. This *knowledge of ourselves* is one of the most *necessary* and *useful* parts of knowledge that we can seek after, and one would think the most easily attainable; because the object lies immediately under our inspection, and if we but attentively view it, we cannot fail of thoroughly understanding it; and we cannot be imposed on and deceived, unless we willingly deceive ourselves. And yet how few are there who thoroughly know themselves, or care and endeavour to do it. They suppose, that all is right in the state of their passions, or they don't choose to be convinced that there is any thing wrong in them; or they find a way to palliate and excuse the very excesses of their passions, and mistake even criminal ones for such as are natural and harmless. 'Tis much easier to let things go on in their common course, than to be at the trouble of correcting and amending them; and they are so partial to themselves, as that they are not willing to lose the good opinion they have entertained of themselves, or to imagine that their habitual course

course can be displeasing to God, or in the final issue prejudicial to their true interest and happiness. But this is a *deceit* of all others the *most dangerous*, and what a wise and prudent man will take the most effectual care to guard against. He loves himself, and cherishes a warm rational concern for his own welfare; and for this very reason chooses to be well acquainted with his own heart, that if upon good inquiry he hath good reason to conclude, that all the affections of it are good in their nature, rightly directed, and kept under proper discipline and government, he may cultivate and strengthen them, and safely enjoy the satisfaction that naturally arises from it; or that if upon the review of himself he discerns any thing irregular or criminal in the state of them, he may have the opportunity of correcting and amending it; that hereby he may become altogether such, as the great author of his nature would have him to be, and that he may have reason to rejoice and be thankful to find that he also is in some good measure, what he himself wishes and endeavours to be.

He will therefore be no stranger to the imaginations and thoughts that pass through, and abide in his heart, or that are dictated by the several affections and dispositions of it; because according to the nature of them, and the indulgence given them, the heart will be denominated either good or bad. *Out of an evil heart proceed evil thoughts*, they are suggested by somewhat wrong in the temper of it, and

if they are harboured, and in the scripture language *lodge or dwell in it*, and are cherished and indulged with pleasure, they shew that the moral temper and character of it is habitually evil. And therefore we should ever be upon our guard; that, though we may not always be able to prevent their arising up in us, for they will sometimes enter by surprize and stealth, and not only unbidden, but against our consent; we may immediately expel them, as dangerous enemies of our peace, and prevent their defiling the sanctuary of our hearts, that should be kept sacred to piety and virtue. And indeed there is nothing more unbecoming the character of a good man, or that argues a more real depravity of heart, than the voluntary admission of corrupt imaginations, the cherishing them in our minds, dwelling on them with pleasure, and causing them to pass in review before us with satisfaction and approbation; when all such suggestions of a profligate imagination and criminal appetites should be regarded with the utmost abhorrence. And there is no good man, who ever recollects the sinful indulgences of his past life, but he detests both the thought and thing, and reviews them with humility and contrition of mind, and secretly but earnestly implores the mercy of God in the forgiveness of them.

As the moral character of our actions takes also its denomination from the *ends* and *views*, that influence and govern us, here also we ought to watch over our hearts, that they may be

be such as we can justify to our own consciences, such as may not depreciate our best actions, such as may instamp a real worth and excellency upon them, such as the great searcher of our hearts may approve, and such as we ourselves may own without shame or dejection at the last great and impartial day of our account; all actions *materially* good, are not always good in a *moral* sense. The attendance on the publick institutions of religion, and even the private services of the family or *closet**, are for the matter of them good, are commanded by God, and may be made extreamly profitable to those, who with a right disposition of mind engage in them. But if our view in these things is that we may be seen and observed of men, have their commendation and applause, may insinuate ourselves into their esteem and confidence, and by their friendship the better promote our worldly views and interests, this is so far from being genuine and acceptable devotion, as that 'tis detestable hypocrisy, and in the highest degree offensive to God. Or if we practice the external duties of religion, by way of compensation for real immoralities of life, and as a supplement to the want of, or our defects in *judgment, righteousness, mercy, temperance, charity, and the government of our passions*, it argues the most stupid ignorance or enthusiasm, or deep corruption of heart, renders all such kind of pretended devotions contemptible and cri-

* Matt. vi. 5.

minal, and exposes men to a peculiarly heavy condemnation. *Charity* may be given for *ostentation*, or through the mere dictates of *natural compassion* and good humour †. In the former case, it is wholly worthless and unprofitable; in the latter, it is defective in moral worth, as it wants a nobler motive to heighten and compleat it, than the mere dictates of constitutional benevolence and goodness. Men may *fast*, and practice bodily severities, to gain the character of great mortification and humility, and self denial, without real contrition, meekness, condescension, and whilst their hearts are full of spiritual pride, bitterness, resentment, and hatred of their neighbour; and when this is the case, there is no more virtue in those things, than in a fool's going to the correction of the stocks, or disciplining his back for his own or others diversion §. These three cases are particularly mentioned by our blessed Lord, as instances of hypocrisy and folly, as of no signification in the account of God, and that can intitle no man to a reward from his goodness. It is the same in all other instances whatsoever. Where the motives are low, selfish or criminal, whatever appearances of good the action may have, it hath the appearance only without the reality of goodness; and whatever advantage it may procure the doers in the present life, it is all the reward they are ever to expect; for folly can never be recom-

† Matt. vi. 1.

§ Matt. vi. 17.

pened by infinite wisdom, nor the shadow of piety and goodness pass on him for the genuine body or substance of them.

How *diligently* therefore should we *watch over our own hearts*, how *intimately* should we be *acquainted* with every thing that passes in them, and how great a point of wisdom is it, in all the duties we perform, and all the good actions that we do, that we suffer no unworthy views and motives to influence and govern us. True religion is seated in the heart. The very foundations of it are laid in principles of truth, firmly believed, and habitually attended to. It consists in the exercise of the best and worthiest affections towards God. Reverence for his authority, fear of his displeasure, the loving him for his goodness, the desire to resemble him, submission to his will, trust in his power, hope in his mercy, and the firm persuasion of his being a rewarder of them that seek and serve him through Christ, are the unalterable essentials of it; and all external acts of devotion that are not animated by those principles, and dictated by these sacred dispositions, want the essential requisites of a truly rational and spiritual devotion. And as to all acts of moral virtue, when they are performed from a full conviction of their intrinsic goodness, as instances of obedience to God, in imitation of Christ, and in hope of approving ourselves to, and being accepted of the Lord; they then become actions of substantial virtue, and genuine piety. And when we are conscious to ourselves, that these are the dispositions

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tions that govern us, in all the great concerns of our lives, and the habitual motives that influence us, in our whole conduct to God and man, we have the sure evidence of our integrity, and every reasonable ground of confidence towards God. An heart purified from all unworthy affections, enlivened and animated by the promises, habits, encouragements and prospects essential to true religion, is an habitation worthy the presence and comforts of God. It possesses all the dispositions of true happiness, fits men for the acceptance of the best of beings, and will finally secure them all those effects of his favour, which natural reason can encourage the hope of, and which are assured to us by the peculiar promises of divine revelation.



SERMON

S E R M O N XI.

The Importance of keeping our Hearts
diligently.

PROVERBS iv. 23.

*Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it
are the issues of life.*

IT is I believe impossible, in the present state of things, and in the manner in which we must here converse and live, so to guard our hearts, and maintain the purity and order of them, as to prevent all irregularities of imagination and thought from entering into them, and keep ourselves free of all those excesses of our affections and passions, which good men are never guilty of without regret, and wise men always endeavour to suppress and get the better of. So far indeed we are happy, that whatever is really involuntary, is not our sin. Whatever be the thoughts, that contrary to our own consent, force themselves into our minds, by mere surprize, and to which we are in no degree really accessary, we are no more accountable for, than we are

for the roivings of a delirium, or the monstrous and absurd imaginations, that are the frequent effects of a frenzy ; and as to all involuntary starts of passion, that are occasioned by the mechanism of our bodies, and the circulation of our blood and spirits ; that do not proceed from strengthened habits, and continued indulgences ; we can be no more criminal upon account of them, than we are for the accidental throbbings of the heart, or the accelerated motions of the pulse in a cold or fever. These things may give us pain, and render necessary the use of proper care and medicine to remove the disorder, but in neither case can constitute us guilty before God.

But though this be true, and a very comfortable consideration to good men under the necessary imperfections, and unallowed infirmities of their present condition ; yet it is no excuse for those *unballed imaginations*, that *crowd* into the minds of men, and *dwell* therein as in their proper habitation ; which owe their rise to a long custom of sinning, and an heart sensualized by criminal indulgences ; and if our passions are easily inflammable, and upon every occasion break out into extravagant excesses, as the consequence of contracted and inveterate habits of vice and wickedness ; here we become guilty in the nature of the thing, and in the estimation of God, our righteous judge. The plea of human infirmity in such circumstances can be of no avail ; for as habits are not natural, but contracted

contracted and self-wrought, they cannot have the character, nor deserve the indulgence of mere natural infirmities ; which are such, and such only, as are the effects of natural constitution, and to which we are unavoidably subject by virtue of those animal propensities, which are inserted into, and inseparable from the frame of our bodies, which we bring into the world with us ; and not such as beset, and prevail over us by our own faults, and which we might have prevented by a due care over ourselves, and the conscientious application of those means, to which providence and grace have directed us, to provide against and secure us from the corruption of our natures, and the prevalence of sensual dispositions and affections.

Were we as *careful* of our hearts, as we should be, *much might be done* to guard them against the entrance of all those evil imaginations and thoughts, which too often crowd into our minds, and are the sparks that kindle the fuel, which too often flames up, to waste and destroy our integrity and peace ; and when they enter into us by surprize, without almost our knowledge, and contrary to our consent ; we may, by a due watchfulness over ourselves, at least hinder their abiding in us. We may expel them as troublesome intruders, and choose whether we will give them any countenance or harbour. 'Tis owing to great negligence and incaution in this respect,

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That men create within themselves many kinds of wants, to which nature and reality never subject them, and which are purely imaginary and artificial, the mere figments of vanity, luxury and pride, which prudence teaches them to guard against, and of which we should immediately divest ourselves the moment we perceive them arising within us ; because if once we give way to them, and possess ourselves with the imagination of their reality and importance, they will necessarily excite within us those strong desires of supplying them, that we shall never easily extinguish, and which will powerfully prompt us to such measures of gratifying them, as are inconsistent with all our greatest obligations, and may involve us in difficulties highly prejudicial to our best interests in time and eternity.

If men would *consider the true ends of life*, and wherein consists the right improvement and real enjoyment of it, they would not only suppress all irregular desires after that fictitious, fantastick kind of happiness, which possesses the imagination, and feeds the hopes of the generality of mankind, but direct their views to objects of such intrinsic worth, as well deserve their pursuit, and which if obtained will abundantly reward all their diligence and labour in securing them. The views by which men are influenced, and the ends they aim at, in great measure characterise their actions, and denominate them,
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in the moral sense, good or evil ; and therefore we ought carefully so to observe all that passes in our hearts, as to extinguish every mean, unworthy view of life, every false motive of action, and especially every criminal inducement in the direction of our conduct, and to cherish and govern ourselves entirely by such considerations and aims, as may render our behaviour to God and man truly rational and worthy, may instamp a real dignity upon our actions, and entitle them to the approbation of our final judge.

Habits of action, whether good or evil, create a strong propensity to them, and facility of doing them, and render them so familiar and natural to us, as that we wish for opportunities to repeat them, and cannot prevail with ourselves to omit any inviting occasion of indulging ourselves therein. This shews the absolute necessity of *perpetual watchfulness* over our hearts, that we may not suffer any absurd, irrational, and criminal *habits* from taking possession of them ; since if suffered to grow inveterate, they will subject reason and conscience, and every better sense of duty and interest to their influence and power ; and because the longer they are indulged, they will grow the more obstinate and incurable. And therefore, if upon a review of the state of our hearts, we find that any sinful dispositions and habits have been contracted by, and gained any ascendancy
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over us ; we should immediately resolve to extirpate them out of our hearts, and give them no rest 'till we have broken their power, and rescued ourselves from the tyrannical influence of them. To be carnally minded, in scripture, is to be wholly under the power of sensual dispositions and habits, in opposition to the Christian temper, and spirit of the gospel ; and this *carnal mind* is expressly declared to be *enmity with God*, irreconcilable with the purity of his nature, and the great views of his moral government ; *for that it is not subject to the will of God, neither indeed can be* ; the will of God, and the perverted will of an habitual sinner, being directly contradictory, and in a state of absolute opposition to each other. And therefore the Apostle justly adds : That they who are in the flesh, or wholly enslaved to sensual affections and passions, cannot please God, *i. e.* are objects of his high displeasure ; their temper and character are his abhorrence ; and they are so far from being the objects of his approbation, as that they must stand condemned at his impartial tribunal. An accustomed sinner, in whom all the habits of vice are in full power and exercise, is in too wretched and impure a condition, ever to admit the presence of God, and the joys of his salvation. He is destitute of every disposition and genuine capacity for true happiness. His own reflections will never produce the testimony of a good conscience, and the rejoicings

rejoicings that flow from it. The sources of pleasure from which he draws his satisfactions, are too gross and polluted, ever to introduce into his mind the satisfactions that flow from reason, converse with God, and the consciousness of piety and virtue ; and so entirely different from, and in their nature contrary to those that enrich and refresh the future world of righteousness and peace, that were he admitted to drink of them, he could never relish them, but would be wretched and unsatisfied amidst all the plenty and sources of happiness, even of Heaven itself. Here the exercises of religion are displeasing and tedious to them ; they absent themselves from them, because they can find no entertainment in the use of them ; the very blessings that are asked in the supplications of religious men to God, are not so much as the blessings they desire ; the celebration of the divine majesty and perfections, the songs of praise, and the sacrifices of thanksgiving, in which true piety rejoices, are, in their account, either the practices of superstition, or dull, insipid employments, in which they can bear no part, because the whole bias and tendencies of their hearts have a quite contrary direction. And if these tendencies remain with them the same in another world, as they are in this ; the same aversions to the exercises of piety will continue there as here ; and in the solemn ascriptions of glory and honour to him, that sits upon the throne, and the lamb for
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ever, they would remain entirely silent, or join in them unwillingly and by a kind of constraint, and continue joyless and unsatisfied, amidst all the triumphs and raptures of the sons of blessedness and glory. Search thyself therefore Christian. See if there be any remains of wrong affections and evil habits, that yet continue to influence thy desires and actions. Purge out this old leaven. So watch over and keep thy heart, as to guard against every tendency of them to ensnare, and defile thee. Suppress them in their first beginnings. Let every lesser and unpremeditated surprize and advantage they gain over thee be recollected with grief, indignation, and abhorrence, excite thee to a more faithful care of thyself for the future, and cause thee with affection and fervency of mind, to pray in those admirable words of the Psalmist: *Search me, O Lord, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way to everlasting life* *.

The best of men, after all their most careful inspection and watchfulness over their hearts, and notwithstanding the frequent victories they have obtained over all their passions and affections, will find it difficult enough to keep them in the perpetual order, which they know 'tis their interest, duty, desire, and endeavour to do. But oh how much harder a task is it for men, who have

* Psalm cxxxix. 23, 24.

given themselves up to perpetual, unrestrained indulgences of sense and appetite, without reflection, and care to lay them under any restraint, and in whom therefore the habits of sin are confirmed and radicated, and still continue in their full force and vigour ! How much harder a task is it, I say, for such persons, to break the power of these habits, to shake off the chains and fetters with which they have bound and entangled them ; fetters to the senses not uneasy and galling, but soft and pleasing, and which they can scarce persuade themselves, even to wish to be delivered from ; and which, when convinced of the absolute necessity there is of renouncing them and becoming free from the bondage in which they held them, they know not how to recover themselves from, nor how to attempt, nor by what powerful means to effect their own salvation. And yet difficult as the work is, it must be done. Our everlasting happiness depends on the success of it ; and by a due watchfulness over our own hearts, and a perpetual guard set upon our passions and affections, it may be finally happily accomplished. An abiding sense of the necessity of doing it ; the entering into serious resolutions of immediately beginning it ; the checking those passions in their first rise and motions, that prompt to the usual indulgences ; the careful abstaining from all the occasions and objects that may lead and tempt them to it ; and make impressions on the heart in favour of it ; the exercising a deep repentance

ance for having offended God, and injured ourselves, by the evil habits we have contracted ; the accustoming ourselves to serious reflection, and all those important considerations that religion offers to our mind ; the cherishing a real hatred and abhorrence of soul of all our past sinful gratifications ; the exciting within ourselves a due relish for the pleasures of reason and conscience, of religion and true virtue ; a diligent use of all the means of conversion, to which God by Christ hath directed us ; and the assistance of the spirit and grace of God, obtained by daily supplication and fervent prayer : These things will enable habitual sinners to become superior to all the greatest difficulties they have to encounter with ; will set them free from the law of sin ; and enable them, though once they cried out from a sense of their danger : O wretched men that we are, who shall deliver us from the body of this death ! to triumph in the words of the Apostle : *Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through Jesus Christ.* And in order the more effectually to secure this victory, we should

3. *Give all diligence so to keep our hearts, as to strengthen and fortify them, by admitting into them the proper guardians and securities of our purity, peace and happiness, and surrendering ourselves wholly to their protection and custody.* An ungarrisoned fortress is a prey to every invader, and requires no difficulty to reduce ; and when those who have it in possession

session have none to oppose them, their possession will be safe and undisturbed. If therefore we would preserve our hearts free from the invasion of those enemies of our peace and happiness, that enter only to defile and destroy, or get rid of them if they have formed admittance, it must be by introducing those friendly and powerful guardians, that will be able to protect and defend them against every hostile attempt, and effectually prevent their ever gaining or retaining the superiority over us. And

As the heart can never be well kept, and duly governed without the powerful assistance of *principles*, and the *firm belief* of those important truths on which the being of religion, and the practice of all moral virtue is supported; these principles should be rightly understood, their evidence clearly discerned, their importance fully attended to, and our adherence to them steadfast and unalterable. Considerations of prudence may sometimes produce a decency of conduct, and be a temporary restraint from the indulgence of some particular bad habits and passions. But it is the force of good principles only, that can reach the heart, that can strike at the root of bad dispositions and affections, and enable men to keep them under perpetual restraint and government. When once we are divested of these, or look on them with indifference, as precarious in their nature, and defective in their evidence and importance; the hearts of men are immediately given up as a prey

to evil thoughts, and all the meanest and vilest propensities of their animal frames; and can have nothing in them to withstand the power of temptation, and prevent their being drawn in, to work out all iniquity with greediness. Here therefore we should be peculiarly watchful over our hearts, not to admit passion and inclination to disaffect and prejudice us against the principles of natural or revealed religion; for whatever plea of excuse for their unbelief such may have, who object to the sufficiency of evidence, after serious enquiry; yet certainly that infidelity, which is owing to the prevalence of corrupt affections and passions, is infinitely absurd and contemptible, and renders men in the highest degree criminal and obnoxious. For sense and appetite can furnish no rational objections against truth, and all conclusions, in reference to what we are to believe and do, drawn under their suggestion and influence, must be delusive in their nature, founded on very incompetent reasons and motives, and highly dangerous in their consequences.

As there are some original *natural fences*, implanted in our very frames, to secure our innocence, and guard us against the entire corruption and waste of our minds, we should labour with the utmost care so to keep our hearts, as that we may *never lose them*, nor suffer them to be trampled down and wasted; for when these are broken up and destroyed, the heart becomes quite defenceless, and there is nothing left in it upon which the
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best principles and most powerful motives can fasten, so as to have their proper efficacy and force. There grows up with reason, when it arrives to any kind of maturity, a strong conviction and sense of the certain and original difference between moral good and evil, as clearly discernible, and as plainly apprehended, as the difference between natural contrarieties, light and darkness, or sweet and bitter, or pleasure and pain. There is, before men are corrupted by practice, and hardened by example, a kind of fear and dread of entering into the ways of vice, and especially of being drawn into the commission of the greater enormities and crimes of life. The great Author of our natures hath cloathed us, 'till we have divested ourselves of it by indulgence, with a kind of native modesty, sense of decency, and the feelings of shame and confusion, that render the approaches to sin difficult, and cause men to start back at the first proposals of it, and reject the temptations to it with abhorrence. The love of character and reputation, and being well thought of and esteemed by the wise and good, is almost natural and essential to us as reasonable creatures; insomuch that he must be a great proficient in sin, and almost divested of humanity, that can persuade himself to become indifferent to character, and wholly regardless of the opinion and sentiments of others concerning him. The very power of reflection creates a consciousness of our own actions,

and every one finds himself accountable to himself for his own conduct; and conscience, if left in its natural state, and before it is hardened and seared by long contracted habits of wickedness, not only acquits and commends us when we do well, but honestly accuses, reproaches, and condemns us, when our actions are contrary to obligation and duty, fills us with uneasy fears and apprehensions, as the consequence of our transgressions; and frequently so haunts and pursues young practitioners in vice, when led by inclination and folly, they are first learning the way to guilt, and initiated into the execrable mysteries of debauchery, as that 'tis not 'till after many struggles and persecutions of conscience, they are enabled to suppress it, to subdue it to inclination, and settle down without remorse, in the way of sinners, and in the seat of the scorner. Now whilst the heart and mind is possessed of these powerful preservatives against the infection of vice and folly, the corruption can never be total, nor the condition remediless and desperate; and therefore we should so continually keep and watch over our hearts, as never to suffer them to be dispossessed of these powerful and friendly forces, which whilst they are suffered to keep garrison within us, will greatly assist us in maintaining our liberty, in repelling all hostile invaders, and securing us to the full enjoyment and firm possession of all the

the immunities, advantages, priviledges and blessings of our reasonable natures. I need only mention it, to shew you the unspeakable danger of his condition who hath lost all sense of the difference between moral good and evil, who is become fearless and intrepid in the paths of sin, who hath put off shame, and is incapable of blushing at the remembrance of the vilest and most dishonourable offences, who hath thrown off all regard to reputation and character, hath entirely suppressed the dictates of conscience, or so steeled himself, as entirely to despise and disregard them. That heart must be in the most desperate situation of corruption, which is thus despoiled of these excellent provisions of nature and providence for its defence and security, and that conduct be equally vile and profligate, that is dictated and directed by it.

As it is of great consequence to our welfare and safety, to prevent the entrance of all corrupt imaginations and thoughts, or immediately to expel them whenever they, unbidden, intrude upon us ; the best way of keeping the heart free from them in both respects, is *to accustom ourselves to considerations and reflections of a quite different nature* ; such as reason may suggest, or the principles, obligations, and advantages of true religion will furnish us with. Good and evil thoughts cannot dwell together at the same time in the same breast. If we receive the one, we

must reject the other, and there are no kind of bad suggestions, that can proceed from the heart, but may be counteracted and expelled by reflections of a quite different nature, which will easily occur to those who are duly acquainted and habitually conversant with, the great things of true religion and godliness. This is one of the best securities against the corruptions of the heart, and the entrance and abiding of those evil imaginations, which too often draw men into wrong measures of conduct, inconsistent with their present peace and final happiness. Thus shall we be able to silence the clamour of all false and imaginary wants, to correct the impulse and cravings of wrong and impatient desires, to dispossess ourselves of all low, irrational, and criminal views, and secure ourselves against these first occasions of sin, which excite and enflame the worst passions and affections of our minds.

As our *passions and affections*, according to the nature of them, are the great motives and springs of action, there can be no better way of keeping the heart from the prevalence of bad ones, than by *rightly directing all the natural ones*, and *introducing* those which are *more excellent and worthy*; cultivating them with our utmost care, and resigning ourselves wholly to their influence and government. Our love and esteem should be led to and terminated on the most deserving and amiable objects; our confidence
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and trust built on those foundations that are stable and permanent ; our fears regulated in their exercise and degree, by the reality and importance of the evils we dread ; our aversions and hatreds limited to what only is odious and detestable ; and our desires and hopes, respectively reduced and encouraged, in proportion to the intrinsic worth of the things they refer to, and the greater or lesser necessity and importance of them to our true happiness. Under this right direction of our passions, the contrary tendency of them will gradually abate, and the exercise of them can scarce become irregular and intemperate. The natural passions, in this view of them, become real dispositions of piety and virtue, and are consecrated, so as to become the genuine graces of the spirit of God. The reverence and esteem that we cherish for God, the affection and love that we bear to Christ, the trust we place in the divine perfection, power, goodness, and promises, the resignation that we exercise to the will and sovereign disposals of providence, the regard we pay to truth and righteousness, the hopes we place on the character and mediation of Christ, the promises of his gospel, and the salvation and glory of the world to come, the hatred we cherish for sin, the fear we cultivate of offending God, and forfeiting his favour ; all these and the like dispositions, are not new created affections, but new directed ones, or the original

ones newly biassed, exalted, and enobled by the objects on which they are terminated, and which, when once they become habitual and prevalent, fortify the heart in the most essential and effectual manner against the entrance and power of every corrupt and criminal passion whatever.

And in like manner, if we would keep our hearts free from all irregular and criminal habits, or mortify and extirpate them, if we have been so unhappy as to contract them ; this can never be effectually done but by the prevalence and influence of the contrary habits of piety and virtue ; first begun under the direction of our Christian principles, and strengthened and improved by daily exercise and practice. The heart can never be divested of pride, but by making it give way to, and cloathing it with humility. Hatred and bitterness of spirit, nothing can expell, but the settlement of a friendly and humane disposition in the room of it. Passion and anger will yield to nothing but the growth of a meek and gentle spirit. Covetousness is incapable of all cure, but by the sole remedy of a prevailing generosity. The habit of intemperance can never be broken, but by the regulations of moderation and sobriety. Every bad custom yields only to its contrary ; and to say all in one word, every habitually wicked man will continue so, 'till he becomes an habitually religious and virtuous one. This is the proof,
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and the only certain and convincing proof, of a real conversion, without which all pretences to it are hypocritical and delusive ; and that heart can never be well guarded, and rightly kept, which is not duly fortified by established and permanent dispositions of every thing that is truly virtuous and praiseworthy ; nor can the powerful tendencies it hath contracted to sensuality and vice ever be overcome and expelled, but by settled and radicated propensities to the practice of universal righteousness. This then should be the care of every man that wishes well to himself, and desires to keep his heart pure and uncorrupt, to prevent bad habits from ever possessing him, or to free himself from the influence of them if contracted, to fortify himself, and if I may be allowed the expression, to garrison his mind with the united forces of all those excellent habits of true religion and moral virtue, which will effectually secure it from all the internal propensities to sin, and the successful influence of all external temptations to commit it.

And finally, what should never be omitted on such a subject, as *the preparation of the heart in man is from the Lord*, he who would keep his own heart in safety and peace, *should secure the protection of the divine power and grace, by the most serious and fervent supplications to God ; for though a man may devise his own way, it is the Lord who directs his steps.* Presumption and self-confidence little become
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the present imperfect and frail condition of mankind; and he, who diffident of himself, though not neglectful of his own duty and safety, lives by faith in, and an humble dependence on the promised aids and assistances of his spirit, is, upon the foundations of natural and revealed religion, the most likely to secure the possession of himself, and to keep all the passions and affections of his heart in that due regulation and order, as shall render them most subservient to his present usefulness and comfort, and the securing his final salvation.



S E R M O N

S E R M O N X I I .

All the Paths of the Lord are Mercy
and Truth.

PSALM XXV. 10.

*All the Paths of the Lord are Mercy and Truth
unto such as keep his Covenant and his Testi-
monies.*

IN the beginning of this Psalm *David* acknowledges his dependance on God, expresses his trust in him, and prays for the protection, mercy, and gracious conduct of God. *To thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul **, *O my God, I trust in thee †*. *Shew me thy ways, O Lord, teach me thy paths ‡*. *Remember not my transgressions : According to thy mercy remember thou me §*. And to encourage his hope in the divine mercy and favour, he reflects upon the essential goodness of God, and his love of righteousness, and from thence argues his readiness rather to instruct and teach even sinners how to repent and reform, than to

* Verse 1. † 2. ‡ 4. § 7.

destroy

destroy them for their transgressions. *Good and upright is the Lord, therefore he will teach sinners in the way* ||; i. e. lead them by his providence and word into the path of duty and happiness. Much more shall the humble and meek be the objects of his care, and favoured with the kind instruction which they need. *The meek will be guide in judgment. The meek will be teach his way* *. All the methods of of his providence towards such shall be conducted by mercy and faithfulness, and all finally contribute to their highest good. As in the words of my text. *All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies* †. The paths of the Lord are the dispensations of his providence. All these shall be mercy and truth; they shall be ordered in great goodness, with a kind and merciful intention, and consistent with all the promises of God, which he hath made to the children of men. But then, they shall be mercy and truth only to such *as keep his covenant and testimonies*; i. e. to such only who acknowledge and submit to the obligations they are under to God, by a regular and constant obedience to his commands. *All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies.* In which words are these two parts,

I. A description of the *character of good men.* They keep God's covenant and his testimonies.

|| Verse 8.

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† 10.

II. Their

II. Their *peculiar happiness*. *All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth to them.*

I. The Psalmist describes the *character of good and pious persons*. *They keep the covenant and testimonies of the Lord*. By the testimonies and covenant of the Lord is meant the same thing : *viz.* the divine law or will, solemnly published and testified to mankind.

The word rendered *testimonies* comes from a root which signifies *to witness* ; and is attributed to the laws or commands of God, because of their solemn promulgation before proper and competent witnesses. Thus the law from Mount Sinai was very awfully published by the ministry of angels, and in the presence of the whole camp of Israel ; God testifying or declaring his will by the most evident and affecting signs. And under the gospel dispensation, God testified his pleasure, and delivered the laws of his kingdom by his only Son ; and after him by his inspired Apostles ; calling on the world to observe the solemn evidence and confirmation of the truth of them, in the signs and wonders, and miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, that attended them. The *testimonies* therefore of God are those great and unalterable laws of religion and virtue, which he hath publicly declared and testified to be agreeable to his will, and solemnly ratified by his supream authority.

The *covenant of God* means, the constitution of religion determined and settled by his wisdom and mercy ; in which is particularly explained

explained, and immutably fixed on the one hand, what God expects from men as their duty; and on the other, what they may expect from God in virtue of his promise, as the consequence of their fidelity in discharge of their duty. So that God's keeping covenant denotes primarily, his faithfulness and truth in accomplishing those voluntary assurances, which he hath granted men, of his favour and blessing, in consequence of their compliance with the terms on which those assurances were given. And mens keeping God's covenant must mean their performing the conditions on which he hath covenanted or promised to bestow upon them the blessings to which those promises relate; which conditions are, faith, repentance, and universal piety and virtue. So that the same laws of God, which are called his testimonies, are also farther represented under the notion of God's covenant by the Psalmist; for these two reasons: Because they are an essential part of the covenant which God hath graciously entered into with mankind; God having made them the unalterable conditions of his final favour and acceptance, and of those invaluable blessings he hath been pleased to grant us the promise of. And because farther, 'tis the unquestionable duty of all persons, to enter into this part of God's covenant, by promising and performing an universal constant obedience to his will, as manifested and revealed to them. Hence it is that obedience to God's command, and keeping his covenant,
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are in the sacred writings equivalent terms : Thus God himself speaks to the people : *If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenants, then shall ye be a peculiar treasure to me**. And David describes the mercy of the Lord to be from everlasting to everlasting, to such as keep his covenant, and remember his commandments to do them. And on the contrary, to disobey the will of God, and violate his statutes, is to break God's covenant. *If ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments, and if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments, but that ye break my covenant : Then will I set my face against you †*. And that God's covenant doth not mean only, what God engages to perform in favour of men, but what he commands them to do in obedience to him, is expressly asserted ; for thus saith Moses to the people : *He declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, even ten commandments, and he wrote them upon two tables of stone ‡*. And therefore to enter into God's covenant, is not only to accept of God's promises, but to bring ourselves under solemn engagements to do whatsoever God hath commanded us, as the necessary term of our having a share in the blessings promised. Thus Moses : *Ye stand this day all of you before the Lord your God § — that thou shouldest enter into covenant with the Lord thy God || — lest there should be amongst you man or woman, or*

* Exod. xix. 5. † Levit. xxvi. 14, 15. ‡ Deut. iv. 13.
§ Deut. xxix. 10. || 12.

tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the Lord our God, lest there should be amongst you a root that beareth gall and bitterness *. And he who cherishes this bitter root, and whose heart turneth away from God, doth not enter into covenant with him, but rejects God's covenant ; and should such a one bless himself in his heart, saying, *I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my heart, to add drunkenness to thirst* † ; 'tis an impious presumption, and God hath declared that he will not spare him, but blot out his name from under heaven ‡.

From these passages it appears that the description in my text, of those who keep God's covenant and his testimonies, is a description of those who solemnly engage and covenant to obey those commands of religion and virtue, which God hath testified or declared to be the standing and unalterable terms of our obtaining those blessings which he hath solemnly covenanted or promised to bestow on them ; and who faithfully perform this their covenant engagement with God. And

Under the Jewish dispensation, these laws of religion and virtue, which are the standing immutable laws of his kingdom throughout all nations, and periods of time, as they were published with great marks of authority and majesty ; so all the prosperity of the nation was made to depend on the regular observance of them ; the highest favours were promised

* Deut. xxix. 18.

† 19

‡ 20.

to obedience, and the violation of them threatened with the severest penalties. And with respect to particular persons, we find the inspired Psalmist constantly and invariably represents piety and virtue as indispensibly necessary to the protection, guidance, support, and acceptance of God. Thus in the Psalm where my text is. *The meek will be guide in judgment : the meek will be teach his way* *. *What man is he that feareth the Lord ? Him shall he teach in the way that he should choose* †. *The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him ; and he will shew them his covenant* ‡. And with respect unto himself he prays. *Let integrity and uprightness preserve me. For I wait on thee* §. Let me by this secure that protection and blessing, which I humbly and heartily pray for from thee.

Under the gospel, obedience to the laws of God, in the regular and constant practice of religion and virtue, is made the *unalterable condition* of all the benefits of redemption ; the blessings of the new covenant of grace being absolutely confined to such who *cleanse themselves from all iniquity, and labour to perfect holiness in the fear of God*. The great comprehensive blessing stipulated on the part of God, in the covenant he hath made with us by Christ is : *I will dwell in them, and walk in them ; and I will be their God* ||. The settled condition of this inestimable privilege is. *They shall be my people. Wherefore come out from*

* Verse 9. † 12. ‡ 14. § 21. || 2 Cor. vi. 16.

amongst them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing: And I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty *.

A proper covenant in its nature is reciprocal, and necessarily implies mutual obligations on the contracting parties. The voluntary promise of God, which he hath obliged himself to perform, is to be a God and Father to us. But then the obligation depends on this, that we become his people, by separating ourselves from the corruptions and vices of a wicked world, and yielding ourselves up to the practice of holiness. Then God will receive us as his people, and bless us as his children. And without our coming under this obligation, we have no part in the covenant of God, nor any solid claim upon his mercy and faithfulness.

This is the plain and natural account, why the great duties of religion and virtue are called God's covenant and testimonies, because he hath solemnly proclaimed them to be the standing unalterable laws of his kingdom, hath inserted them into his covenant of grace and mercy with mankind, hath made all the several promises of his covenant in Christ absolutely to depend on them, and commands and expects from all mankind that they should heartily and willingly come under these obligations, and in all parts of life act answerable to them.

* 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18.

The character then of a truly good man, and a sincere Christian, is one who from a firm belief of the being and perfections of God, and a serious, conscientious regard to his authority; from a firm persuasion of the truth of Christ's character, as the messenger of God, and the author of eternal salvation; and from a sincere grateful acceptance of the promises of God, and dependence on his mercy through him, keeps God's covenant and testimonies; who acknowledges the wise constitution of this covenant, the reasonableness and excellency of those eternal laws of truth and righteousness, which are inserted into it, and become an essential part of it; who from a sense of duty brings himself under the most solemn promises of obedience; whose habitual care is to answer these sacred obligations from a full conviction of the indispensable necessity thereof, to his having an interest in, and solid claim to the promised blessings of eternal salvation by the Lord Jesus Christ; whose regard to the laws of God and righteousness is *universal*, extending to the whole-compass of commanded duty; *cheerful and willing*, arising from an intire approbation of the will of God; *constant and persevering*, reaching to every condition, and even to the end of life: Who, though he is sensible of human infirmities, allows himself in no habitual course of vice; whose errors are his burthen and grief; whose repentance for every deviation from the rule of his duty is genuine and sincere, and

manifested by a stricter guard over his temper and conduct for the future. In a word, he is one, who maintaining a sense of God's authority and Christ's love upon his heart, and desiring above all things to be approved and accepted by him through Christ, and to become intitled to the blessings of the everlasting covenant by him; purposes and resolves on an universal constant obedience, and gives the substantial proofs of his sincerity in this respect, by continually abounding in all those fruits of righteousness, which are by Christ Jesus to the praise and glory of God our Father. This is the person who is steadfast in God's covenant, and to whom all the ways of the Lord shall be mercy and truth. This leads me

II. To the second general, which is to consider the *peculiar happiness* of such persons as represented to us by the Psalmist in these words of my text: *All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth.* And they teach us the following things.

I. That such as keep the covenant and testimonies of the Lord are in a *peculiar and special* manner the *objects of his care*, and for whose welfare and happiness he is more immediately and tenderly concerned. This is frequently asserted by divine revelation. *Thus the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy* *: viz. to observe and guide, and *keep them in all their*

* Psalm xxxiii. 18.

ways. And again. *The righteous Lord loveth righteousness ; his countenance doth behold the upright* †, i. e. with peculiar pleasure and approbation.

And this is highly consonant to the soundest principles of reason. For though it be certain, that God hath a real affection for, and wishes well to *all* mankind, as they are his *creatures*, and his *children* by creation ; yet such is the perfection and absolute rectitude of his nature, that he *cannot approve and delight* in such of them, who debase themselves by criminal indulgences, and thereby render themselves destitute of that divine image, that moral resemblance to himself, which is their chief glory, and their only foundation for a share in the divine esteem and complacency. No. The approbation and displeasure of God follows from, and is ever suited to the moral character of men ; and the same unspotted purity of his nature, must always and every where render sin his absolute aversion, and secure to an unfeigned piety and virtue his sincerest affection and acceptance. And the certain, undeniable consequence from this is, the exercise of a peculiar care and providence over the righteous and good ; for the affection which God bears towards them is not an impotent or indolent passion, but an affection productive of its proper effects, and which manifests itself in real and substantial instances of benevolence and good-

† Psalm xi. 7.

ness. So that they who are conscious to themselves of their integrity in religion and virtue, have all the reason in the world to assure themselves of a continued interest in the friendship of God, and of such a peculiar and distinguishing share in his esteem and love, as the rest of mankind never can have, nor reasonably claim or hope for. And

2. As the proof of this, *all the ways of God towards them shall be mercy*. He will take them under the *peculiar care and protection of his providence*. As all the great concerns of their lives are subject to his disposal, he will conduct them for their benefit, and make them in the final issue turn out to their advantage. Mercy and goodness shall follow them all their days.

With respect unto *temporal* blessings, the truly good may expect such a share of them as they *really need*, and as will be *best conducive* to their *final happiness*; and should God grant them more than this, so much of worldly prosperity as would prove a snare to them, and draw them into destructive courses, this would not be a way of mercy, but of real displeasure and indignation. And methinks this should be a consideration, that should form our minds into a state of the most perfect contentment, under any of the disadvantages of the present state to which we may be subject. Let but the Christian allow this, which is equally certain from reason and revelation, and he could not fail of
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being easy : The God whom I serve is perfectly acquainted with the whole chain of causes and effects. He fully knows the particular inclinations, passions, and appetites that possess me. The objects that would excite them, and lead them into criminal excesses. He foresees what instances of worldly prosperity would betray me into sin, and finally ruin me ; that this particular blessing I am fond of, and sometimes repine for the want or loss of, it would render me indifferent to religion and virtue, disaffect me to my supream happiness, and make me careless in the pursuit of my eternal salvation. And do I therefore wonder that 'tis denied me ? Is not the great engagement of his covenant with me, that all his ways towards me shall be *mercy* ? But would it be a procedure of real mercy, to heap on me such degrees of prosperity in the present world, as would ruin and destroy all my expectations in a better ? No. Let mercy pursue its own course, and let nothing ever be vouchsafed to me, that is inconsistent with the purposes of the divine mercy in my eternal salvation. This is the reasoning of a truly wise and religious mind, that thinks rightly of God, and wishes well to its own best interest.

However, the favours of God's external providence are frequently multiplied upon good men, as a present reward of their piety and goodness. He crowns their diligence with success, and gives them not only the

necessaries, but the conveniences of life. In circumstances of doubt and difficulty he directs their path, and teaches them to order their affairs with discretion. In times of danger he protects them with his favour as with a shield, and gives his angels charge concerning them, so that no evil hath power to hurt them. If distempers befall them, he shews his goodness in healing their diseases, and causes them to return to life and health, that they may praise his name. In a word, as he bears them a fatherly affection, and rejoyceth to see them happy; he oftentimes so overrules all his dispensations of providence to them, as shall most effectually conduce to the increase and establishment of their present comfort and prosperity.

But as prosperity hath its snares, and men are not always able to bear it; God is oftentimes pleased to suffer those who keep his covenant and testimonies, to fall into many, and those severe and burthensome afflictions. Now the way of God, even in these afflictive providences towards his people in mercy. *For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth* *. 'Tis through the dictates of mercy and love that he permits their befalling them. Was he indifferent to their welfare, and unconcerned about their happiness, he would suffer them to go on, without ever interrupting their flow

* Heb. xii. 6.

of worldly prosperity, or endeavouring to bring them, by gentler chastisements, to remember themselves, their duty, and their salvation. But as he hath set his heart upon them for good, rather than suffer the world to ruin them, and permit them to go in an habitual course of wickedness and vice, he will *visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes*; thus like an indulgent parent chastening them *for their profit, that they may be partakers of his holiness, and that their afflictions may yield them the peaceable fruits of righteousness*. This is the kind and friendly view of the mercy of God in the trials he permits to befall the righteous and good.

And as their afflictions are the appointments of unquestionable mercy, in the great intention and view of them; so there will be farther proofs of *mercy* in the *circumstances, degrees, and duration* of them. They will be such in kind, as God knows we are best able to bear, or as are most conducive to exercise those graces we are most defective in, to preserve us from those snares we are most endangered by, and to reform us from those particular sins we are most subject to the commission of. Perhaps we think the present burthen we labour under to be peculiarly severe. But yet perhaps 'tis the only one we could have supported with decency, or that in the end would have proved medicinal and healing. Other kind of afflictions might have driven us farther from God,
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rendered us impatient and intractable, or failed of the cure which the mercy of Heaven intendeth by them. Besides, the mercy of God appears in his readiness to yield men the comforts and supports which they need under them. If our afflictions are heavy, we may pray for, so as to *obtain grace to help us in the time of need*; such measures of *grace* shall be fully *sufficient for us*; such *strength* from God as *shall be made perfect in our weakness*. So that the aids of Heaven shall be proportioned to your trials, and the consolation of God abound towards us for our support.

And, finally, if we are wise to comply with the design of them, and when the ends of God's mercy in sending them is answered, we have reason to expect that God will *put an end* to them, and graciously find a way for our escape out of them. For *God doth not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men*, or take pleasure in their distresses. And therefore as he never afflicts us but when there is need, either to promote his own glory, or our profit; so there is reason from the wisdom and goodness of God to rest assured, that when the design of goodness intended by them is fully answered, there shall be a final period put to them; either by the affliction's entire removal from us, or by the abatement of the painful sense of them, or by our removal from the affliction into that blessed world, where we shall enter into the rest of God, and enjoy the promised reward
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of our faith and patience. So that in every view of the affliction of the truly righteous and pious, they have reason to acquiesce in them as the appointments of real affection and goodness; and in whatsoever circumstances they are, or can be, to comfort themselves with this consideration: All the paths of my God towards me shall be mercy and love. And, lastly,

3. They shall be all of them consistent with the *truth and faithfulness of God*. The truth or faithfulness of God is often spoken of in Scripture as an encouragement to the upright and good. *O Lord, thou art a God full of compassion and gracious, long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth* *. And in the New Testament. *Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it* †. Now this truth of God plainly refers to his covenant engagements with his people, or to his promises of mercy and grace in which he hath caused them to hope. And when the Psalmist assures us, that *all the paths of the Lord shall be truth to them that keep his covenant*, he means, that God will abundantly make good all his kind assurances in their behalf, and so conduct all the methods of his providence towards them, as shall most effectually conduce to make them partakers of the blessings promised. Some promises to the upright and faithful are more absolute and express: Such as the pardon of their sins, their acceptance

* Psalm lxxxvi. 15.

† 1 Thes. v. 24.

to favour, their support under temptation, the comforts and assistance of his holy spirit, and their preservation by his power through faith unto salvation. These are blessings absolutely connected with virtue and piety, and as God himself hath thus graciously connected them, he hath through an abundant condescension and goodness, given every faithful Christian an humble yet strong claim upon himself, and they may plead even the justice and faithfulness of the great and blessed God for performance. *For God is not a man that he should lye, nor the son of man that he should repent.* And how much surer a ground of comfort are such absolute assurances as these from the best of beings, than if we were left to the mere reasonings of our minds in cases of such importance as these. I acknowledge that reason would give some ground for such expectations of good men ; but full certainty, so as to exclude all doubt, must depend upon promise and actual engagement. And therefore in proportion as certainty exceeds conjecture, and assurance is better than the highest probability, so much stronger must the encouragement be which proceeds from divine revelation, than any that could be given us by unassisted reason.

There are other promises, as to which God hath left himself more at liberty, and the performance of which depend on his pleasure and wisdom, and from which men have no absolute claim, any farther than as the granting them is consistent with, and
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contributes to the more effectually fulfilling those divine engagements which are positive and express. Such are all the promises of worldly favours and blessings without exception; blessings which are not in their nature essential to our true happiness; and which oftentimes, were they given in abundance, would prove such strong temptations even to good men, as would probably cause them to forfeit the nobler blessings absolutely connected with sincerity and fidelity. And therefore the same truth and faithfulness of God that oblige him to perform the promises he hath given us a certain claim to, the same kindness and mercy of God from which the promises of pardon, grace, and eternal life proceed, lead him to withhold from us all those inferior blessings, which we could not enjoy with safety, and of which the grant would prove prejudicial to our highest eternal interest. So that even afflictions themselves, when they become necessary to reform, quicken, exercise, and preserve the truly good, as they are arguments of the divine benevolence and care, so are they the solid proofs of the divine faithfulness and truth. For all the paths of God are faithfulness and truth, to them that keep his covenant and testimonies.

How strong an encouragement doth this subject afford us, for fidelity in the covenant of God, and care to observe the divine testimonies. Would any thoughtful person, who considers his dependance on God every
moment

moment of his being, the terrors of his anger, and the comforts of his favour, be excluded from a share in the mercies of his nature, and the promises of his covenant in Christ? Would we have the paths of God towards us all anger and severity, and instead of enjoying the pleasing light of his countenance, discern nothing in him but awful frowns, and the marks of his displeasure? Would we be willing to have the providence of God set itself against us, and all the methods of it conspiring to render us wretched? Is there not something infinitely pleasing in the thought of having an interest in the eternal and unchangeable mercies of God, and solid claim, for the most valuable blessings we can wish or want, upon the divine veracity and justice? This is the sure privilege of those only who keep the covenant and testimonies of God.

And are we conscious to ourselves, that this is our constant endeavour and care, what solid ground have we for satisfaction and peace, and with what intire chearfulness may we commit the care of all our concerns in well doing to the conduct and disposal of God's providence? We have not only the mercies of God's nature but we have more. We have covenant engagements, we have solemn promises, to plead and urge in our behalf, for every blessing we really need. God himself hath assured us by immediate revelation, and the manifold experience of the truly good, that all things shall be mercifully

cifully over-ruled for our benefit, and contribute to our final acceptance and salvation. And are not the promises of the God of truth to be depended on? Should we repine at any thing that he orders, when 'tis an orderance of mercy, and in pursuance of the promises of his unchangeable grace? No. Trust in him at all times, ye righteous, and let his word be the foundation of your constant hope. For though the Heavens may perish and wax old, his word is a tried word, of which not a tittle shall pass away, without its full accomplishment.



S E R M O N XIII.

Christ the Friend of his obedient
Disciples.

JOHN XV. 14.

Ye are my Friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.

IT is esteemed, and not without reason, a very high honour and priviledge, to be numbered amongst the friends of persons of great eminence, rank and station; and there can scarce be any character of higher distinction and dignity, than that of being the friend of the king; the being owned and regarded by him as such. The wise man represents it in this view, when he says: *He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips, the king shall be his friend* *. i. e. Integrity and candor of disposition, and a graceful, polite conversation, have such powerful charms in them, as will insinuate themselves into the minds of kings, and almost irresistibly

* Prov. xxii. 11.

secure their friendship. The Apostles of our blessed Saviour, as well as the rest of the Jews, expected that their master would be as the Messiah, a temporal prince, and that they should enjoy peculiar advantages under his government, and be exalted above others by the honours that should be conferred on them. And our Lord in my text assures them, that he would take them into the number of his friends, if they would obey his commands, and distinguish them as such by the favours he vouchsafed them. An admission into the counsels of princes, and the secrets of the cabinet, is a peculiar mark of the royal confidence and favour, and adds dignity to nobility and station. And in allusion to this, our Lord tells his Apostles in the verse after my text : *Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knows not what his Lord doth. But I have called you friends ; for all things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known to you ** : I have led you into the secrets of my commission from God my Father, and thereby treated you as my companions and intimate friends, and not as servants, who are not intrusted with the counsels and secret views of their master ; whose business is to obey orders, and not to enquire the reasons and motives of them.

But though our blessed Saviour honours his faithful disciples with the character of friends, he did not thereby intend to cancel

* Verse 15.

their obligations of submission and obedience to him. Those whom earthly princes honour with the character of *friends* do not cease to be their *subjects* and *servants*; and the higher they stand in their master's favour, and the more distinguishing marks of confidence and friendship they are treated with, they are bound to greater fidelity in their stations, and to exert themselves with proportionably greater diligence in executing their commands, and supporting their authority, their honour and interest. And therefore our Lord, when he tells his Apostles, that he would not treat them as servants so much as friends; yet lets them know, that the very condition of his friendship to them, was their obedience to his commands. *Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.*

He here evidently assumes the character of their *Lord and Master*, asserts his right to command, and their obligations to obey, and to obey him in every thing he commanded them. The friendship between Christ and his disciples is not that which subsists between equals, but between persons infinitely different in rank, dignity, and perfection; which doth honour to them, and from whence no real benefit, or accession of dignity can accrue to him; which arises solely from his condescension, and from no previous merit and worth in them; and which though it introduces them into the most valuable privileges, and hath connected with it the most

most valuable and durable blessings, yet abates nothing of the distance between them, diminishes nothing of his supream authority over them, admits them into no indecent familiarities with him, allows of no neglects of veneration and homage to him, nor exempts them from any single instance of obedience to him. His commands are all sacred to every one that he honours with his friendship, and they count it their happiness as well as duty to obey them.

Many were the *commands* which our blessed Lord gave to his Apostles, and those who attended him during the exercise of his ministry on earth; not relating to ceremonial observances, and external rites and forms of religion, of which there is little or nothing to be found in any of the instructions which he delivered to his hearers; but to the great and weightier matters of the law of God; the *love of God with all the heart, the love of our neighbours as ourselves*, the regulation of our passions and desires, the exercise of all the worthiest affections of human nature, and the bringing forth all the amiable and excellent fruits of righteousness and true holiness. This must be said in honour of the precepts of Christianity, and the doctrines of its great author, that they are *comprehensive* of the *whole of true religion and real virtue*, in their inward dispositions, the external duties required by them, the sacred principles that excite to and animate them, and all the rational and weighty motives, that are necessary

to support the practice of them. They extend to all ranks and conditions of men, to all their various stations and characters, to all the several relations of life they bear, to all the different changes, periods and circumstances of their beings, insomuch that it is not possible to add a single precept of religion and piety, that hath any foundation in truth and reason, that is not plainly comprehended in the commands of Christ, or taught by his Apostles, under the direction and inspiration of his holy spirit.

As these commands of Christ are *all* of them enforced by his authority, and are the precepts of the eternal God by him; as they are commands of immutable truth and righteousness; all calculated to promote the happiness of those who obey them, and are necessary to the approving ourselves the genuine disciples of Christ, and the faithful subjects of his kingdom, our obedience to all of them is expressly required, and indispensibly necessary to our becoming the friends of Christ. *Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.* Faith gives no privilege or dispensation to violate any of them. There are no freedoms of love, or grants of friendship inconsistent with duty. Zeal in lesser matters will not exculpate for the neglect of greater, nor will a partial regard to some of the easier requirements of Christ, excuse us for an habitual, wilful neglect of others more difficult, and therefore more unpleasing. There can scarce be an instance of greater presumption

presumption in a subject, than to assume to himself a dispensing power, and so to distinguish between the laws of his prince, as to make his own inclinations and private views the rule and measure of his obedience to them; regarding some and rejecting others, as best suits his interest or pleasures. The authority of Christ is in all instances equally obliging, and his precepts have in every respect the same truth and reason to support them, and are in their nature the very proofs of his friendship to them, and regard for their happiness. And therefore every one who knows how to value this friendship of the Son of God, instead of measuring and abridging his duty by his inclination, will subdue his inclination to principle and duty, and study to approve himself to his great Lord and Master, by an *universal, unlimited obedience* to his will. Thus only can he maintain the consciousness of his own integrity, and hope to be acquitted and rewarded as a good and faithful servant, in the day when God by Jesus Christ will judge the world in righteousness.

And how unspeakably great is the *advantage* of doing what Christ commands us, represented by him in the words of my text. *Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.* I will receive you into the number of them, treat you as such, and give you a share in all the priviledges you can desire or expect from me. How great is the *condescension* and *goodness* of our blessed Lord in
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thus admitting sinful men into so honourable, near and intimate a connection with himself, and how *substantial* is the *happiness* arising from it !

Friendship implies in its very nature *peculiar affection* and *distinguishing esteem* for the object of it. It hath its foundation in love, and cannot subsist without it, and collects and unites all the powers and forces of it, that it may terminate the more warmly on the person who attracts it. And this is included in the friendship of Christ to men, such especially as keep his commandments. He bears them the sincerest and warmest affection. He tells his Apostles, *as the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you. Continue ye in my love. If you keep my commandments ye shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love* *. How strongly descriptive is this, both of the sincerity and intenseness of his love. God declared him to be his *only begotten*, and therefore his *well beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased* ; and if he loves us as the Father loved him, it must be without dissimulation and hypocrisy, it excludes every thing of indifference and coldness, every thing of humour, caprice, fickleness, and inconstancy, and must be permanent and immutable. And though the words above-mentioned were spoken immediately to the Apostles, yet this affection of Christ was not peculiar to them ; for he de-

* John xv. 9, 10.

clares in general of all: *He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me, and I will love him, and manifest myself to him* *; hereby plainly making his love and friendship as extensive as faith in him and obedience to his will. Of this love of Christ it is impossible we can ever doubt, when we consider that he left his original glory, submitted to all the infirmities of our mortal state for our benefit, went about doing good whilst he conversed on earth, and gave the last proof of his affection and friendship to us, by dying, in order to obtain eternal redemption for us. And how pleasing and desirable a circumstance is it to be beloved of the Son of God! What are the qualifications of the persons one would wish to be esteemed and beloved by? I can speak for myself, and I believe for you also: Persons of superior rank and dignity, purity of heart, sanctity of character, distinguished wisdom and knowledge, amiableness of temper, extensive usefulness, and liberal sources to gratify the friendly, generous disposition. All these characters meet in Christ in the highest perfection, and therefore to be beloved of him is the most desirable circumstance of our beings, this is that affection we may well value ourselves on, and justly glory and triumph in if we can obtain it.

Friendship farther interests itself in the *prosperity and happiness* of those whom it em-

* John xiv. 21.

braces, and is solicitous to promote their real welfare. It is so kindly affectioned towards them, as to look upon their concerns as its own, to wish them every thing they really want, or can reasonably desire. And how eminently doth this character distinguish, adorn, and enhance the value of the friendship of Christ! He is a friend to our best interest in the present life, and to the health, perfection, dignity and happiness of our reasonable spirits. The generous concern that possesses him is, that we may here obtain mercy and forgiveness from God whom we have offended, the treasures of all useful knowledge, settled habits and dispositions of genuine piety and virtue, to render us partakers of a divine nature, the pleasures of integrity, the satisfactions of a good conscience, peace with God, the joys of a well grounded, lively hope of glory, and a sure and established interest in his favour and acceptance. Nor is this regard of Christ for us limited to time. His love to his friends hath no bounds to its duration. He wishes their eternal interest, and is solicitous to render them partakers of blessings substantial in the kingdom and presence of his Father and his God. Arguments these of the fervency and sincerity of his affection, that it is without any dissimulation to abate the value of it, and void of every circumstance that can lower the obligations arising from it.

Again, *friendship* is of a very tender nature, hath quick feelings, strong sensibilities, enters

ters into the afflictions and distresses of those it embraces, and kindly compassionates and pities them under them. It is a very strong expression of *Job* : *To him that is afflicted, pity should be shewn from his friend, but he forsaketh the fear of the Almighty* * : Or as the words should certainly be rendered : He who is defective, or grows cold in his affection to his friend in his affliction, even he forsakes the fear of the Almighty. How far was this from the character of Christ ? In goodness and compassion, who is there that can compare with the Saviour of mankind ! How numerous are the proofs of his tender sympathy with those, whom he saw labouring under difficulties and miseries ! *When the leper came to him, he was moved with compassion, and put forth his hand and healed him* †. When he saw an *only son* carrying to his grave, and the *tender mother weeping* over him, he kindly said to her *weep not*, and instantly *restored* him to her joyful embraces ‡. When the multitude that followed him were spent with *fasting*, he said to his disciples : *I have compassion on the multitude, for they continue with me now three days, they have nothing to eat, I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way* §, and immediately *fed* them with bread of his own *miraculous* creation. When he saw *Martha* and the *Jews weeping* on account of the death of *Lazarus*, he entered into their sorrows, he bore their griefs,

* *Job* vi. 14.
§ *Matt.* xv. 32.

† *Mar.* i. 41.

‡ *Luke* vii. 12—14.

and

and mixed his tears with those of the mourners *. When the Jews watched him to see if he would heal the withered hand, on the sabbath day, he looked round on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts †; and when he could do no more, and found that the destruction of Jerusalem was inevitable, when he came near and beheld it, he wept over it, and in the agony of his distress cried out: *Oh! that thou hadst known, even thou at least in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes ‡.* Indeed his whole life manifested the tender goodness of his heart, and the share he took in the afflictions of the miserable and unhappy §. He was touched with the feeling of all our infirmities, and was in all things made like to his brethren, that he might be a faithful and merciful high priest, in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people ||. Even his exalted and godlike state in Heaven hath not quenched his compassion for sinful men. He pities the sinner that hath no pity for himself, and wishes his recovery and safety whilst he is madly inviting his own destruction. Having himself suffered, being tempted, he knows how to have compassion on those who are tempted, and from his own experience of the danger of a tempted state, is able and strongly prompted to succour them that are tempted. He knows all the disadvantages of our present condition, and if I may use the expres-

* John xi. 35.

† Mark iii. 5.

‡ Luke xix. 41, 42.

§ Heb. iv. 15.

|| ii. 17.

sion in a figurative sense, weeps with his genuine disciples when they weep, in all their afflictions he is afflicted *, and in his love and in his pity, will sooner or later redeem them. For,

Friendship is not only full of compassion, but ever ready and propense to exert itself for the benefit and safety of those who come within the reach and influence of it, according to the power and ability it possesses.

It is an observation of the wise author of the ancient book of Ecclesiasticus †, that “some men are friends for their own occasion, and will not abide in the day of trouble. They are companions at the table, but will not continue in the day of affliction.” But the Son of God can never be a friend for his own occasion, as he cannot want any thing that we can give, nor receive any advantage from the services that we can pay him. He is a friend to us for our own sakes only, and because he knows our distresses, and is willing to relieve us under them. He can therefore never forsake us when we need his help, never look cool and indifferent upon us when we want his assistance, nor like the Psalmist’s lovers and friends, *stand aloof from our affliction* ‡, when we wish him to be near, and a present help in the time of trouble. His power is almighty and he can save us; his friendship is strong and permanent, and will never desert

* Isaiah lxiii. 9. † Eccles. vi. 8, 10. ‡ Psalm xxxviii. iv.
us.

us. He knows we are sinners, came into the world to save us, and died to purchase our forgiveness; and if we are *weary and heavy laden* with the sense of our guilt, and the fears of a divine displeasure, *he will give rest to our souls* by reconciling us to God, securing us from condemnation, and causing us to rejoice in the hope of glory. He is acquainted with the fickleness and inconstancy of human nature, and the continual need we have of divine supports to settle, strengthen and establish us, in the discharge of our duty, and the pursuit of our highest happiness; and he is ever ready to vouchsafe us the assistance of his blessed spirit to *confirm us blameless to the end*. *He was in all things tempted like as we are, though without sin, and will suffer no temptation to befall us, but what is common to and supportable by men, and will with every temptation find out a way for our escape, that we may be able to bear it. He was exceeding sorrowful even unto death, at the prospect of his own sufferings, and well knows how liable we are to be in bondage through the fears of death.* Let us but keep his commandments, and he will take away the sting and terrors of death, and enable us to await the hour of it, and bear its nearest approaches, not only with resignation, but with cheerfulness and pleasure; and what no created friendship can do for us, his will; *restore us to a glorious and blessed immortality.* In a word, as *he is able to do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think*, he
will

will do for us every thing that we can hope or wish for from the most consummate goodness, aided by the exertion of almighty power.

It is a farther essential quality of *friendship*, that it *treats with great indulgence the faults and errors* of those whom it receives into its bosom, never imputes to them involuntary offences, never strictly animadvert on lesser failings, hath *charity* enough to *cover a multitude of sins*, gladly accepts the proper acknowledgments for offences committed, forgives when there is a becoming sense of them, and rejoices to triumph over them by renewed instances of affection and favour. Oh ! how illustrious an example of this have we in the Son of God ! *Peter* denied him with oaths and curses, and yet *he looked him into repentance*, and not only *forgave* him, but *restored* him to his *office and dignity* as an Apostle. Though *all his disciples forsook him and fled* from him in the hour of his trial, his love to them triumphed over their infirmities, and when risen from the dead, without reproaching them for their deserting him, received them again with his former confidence and affection. He came to save, and he knew how to pardon, he professed himself the friend of mankind, though he knew them to be sinners, and will therefore never condemn, where there is room to shew mercy and forgive. Our involuntary errors he will never remember against us, nor shall our past violations of his commands ever separate

us from his love, if we turn to a better obedience for the future ; for he can have *compassion on the ignorant and them that are out of the way* ; or as the words should be rendered * : He can be equitably disposed, or affected with moderation toward those who are ignorant and erroneous, who either know not their duty, or wander from the path of it.

Yea more than this, instead of rigidly remarking our errors, or taking pleasure in reproaching us upon account of them, or renouncing his friendship towards us for the many mistakes of conduct with which we are chargeable, he approves himself our fast and faithful friend, even by becoming *our patron and advocate*, and interceding for us with his heavenly Father, *that we may obtain mercy, and grace to help us in every time of need*. Job in the agony of his distresses, and the full conviction of his own heart of his innocence, passionately cries out : *Oh that one might plead for a man with God, as a man pleadeth for his friend* † ! This is an instance of a truly generous and cordial friendship, to apologize for the errors of a friend, as far as they are capable of an apology, to vindicate him against false or aggravated accusations, and to employ the power and interest it hath to prevent or mitigate his condemnation. Blessed Saviour, how faithful, how affectionate is thy friendship to the sons of men ! *If any man sin*

* Μετριοπαδεις.

† Job xvi. 21.

we have an advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the righteous, whose blood cleanseth from all sin, and he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us. How great is this benevolence, that he thus condescends to act in Heaven itself as the protector of sinful men, that he patronizes their cause, that he pleads the merits of his own sufferings and death for their forgiveness and restoration to favour, and that though he sits at the right hand of God, he is there not forgetful of his friends on earth, but employs his interest with God his Father for their benefit and salvation ! And what may we not expect, if we keep his commands, from an intercession so powerful and constant ; from his advocacy, who is the well beloved Son of God, who is appointed by his Father's goodness to this high and benevolent office, and even *advanced by him to be a Prince and a Saviour, to grant repentance and the forgiveness of sins.*

How great and valuable are the blessings which he is empowered to bestow, as the friend and advocate of mankind, and which he is able to bestow, in whom it hath pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell. With him are all the treasures of knowledge and wisdom, and friendship is in its nature communicative, and the friends of princes are admitted to their secrets, initiated into their counsels, and made privy to the most concealed measures they pursue. And therefore Christ tells his disciples in the verse following
my

text : *Henceforth I call you not servants ; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doth. But I have called, i. e. owned and treated you as friends ; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you ; as he revealed to them the secret purposes of his Father in sending him into the world, and promised them his blessed spirit, that should lead them into all that truth which it was necessary for them to know, in order to spread the knowledge of his gospel amongst the several nations of the earth. And when he was on earth, how excellent and important were the subjects on which he discoursed with his Apostles ! How useful the conversation he entertained them with ! How did he open their minds to knowledge ! How kindly did he remove their prejudices, and teach them gradually, as they were able to bear it, one truth after another, relating to the kingdom of God ! And though we have not the benefit of personal converse with him, as his disciples had, and are not to expect from the advantage of his friendship any new discoveries and revelations, as they had ; yet still he now liberally communicates to us, from his own fulness of grace and truth, by means of his gospel, that sacred repository of divine truth, all those eternal counsels of God, which they were commissioned to publish to mankind, that relaté to the redemption of a sinful world, all those principles of divine truth that we are concerned to know, all those important duties, that we are*

are bound to practice, all those sacred and powerful motives, that are proper to influence us, and all those realities and powers of the life and world to come, that may most effectually excite and establish our hopes, fill us with comfort, and render our obedience to his commands an easy and delightful service. Nor will those *secret assistances* of his *spirit* be ever wanting to good and upright minds, that are necessary to direct them in the pursuit of truth, to preserve them from pernicious and destructive errors, and to secure the good influence of the principles they believe upon their hearts and lives. And this is one peculiar advantage of a well chosen friendship, and of intimacy contracted with persons of superior wisdom and understanding, that it is so highly improving, so communicative of knowledge, and conveys in the most easy and engaging manner the most valuable and beneficial instruction; according to that certain maxim: *He that walks with the wise shall be wise* *. And let us but walk with Christ, by obeying his commands and imitating his example, and he will make us wiser than he who hath the heart to multiply his worldly treasures, and than the mere Philosopher, who hath the most extensive knowledge of the system of the universe; even wise to the pleasing our God, and the eternal salvation of our souls.

* Prov. xiii. 20.

As true *friendship* is thus liberal in imparting what it knows, and loves to share its secrets with those on whom it terminates, it is *generous* and *free* in the communication of what it hath to give, and takes a pleasure in bestowing on them those favours which may contribute to their happiness, or tend to their honour. All things are common amongst friends, is a known maxim, and there cannot be, in the nature of things, a genuine friendship that is ungenerous, parsimonious, illiberal and sordid. The Friendship of princes is for this reason preferable to all other, because they have more to bestow, and are known to be peculiarly bountiful to their favourites. When the officers of *Antiochus* persuaded *Mattathias* to become a pattern of obedience to the king's command, by his conformity to the idolatrous religion of the Pagans, the powerful motive he offered was :
 “ So shalt thou and thy house be in the
 “ number of the king's friends, and thou
 “ and thy children shall be honoured with
 “ silver and gold and many rewards * ;” the royal bounty being the natural effect of the royal favour and friendship. But what are the riches and honours that earthly princes have to bestow, in comparison of those which he who is *King of kings, and Lord of lords*, hath in his power to vouchsafe to his faithful subjects, whom he dignifies with his friendship ! Theirs are all fading treasures, and transitory honours ; his substantial and

* 1 Mac. ii. 18.

durable.

durable. Theirs respect the body only, his the immortal soul. Theirs are limited to time and the present world ; his reach to a future state, and are lasting even to eternity. He calls us brethren ; a title this that earthly princes conferred on others, when they would give them the most distinguishing mark of their favour and friendship ; and a title, which, as conferred by Christ, exalts us higher than the highest of earthly monarchs can raise us. He introduces us into the household and family of God, and gives us the liberty of freedom and access to the throne of his grace, whenever our wants or our inclinations lead us to approach it. *Yea, he makes us kings and priests to his heavenly Father, and allows us to sit down in his Father's kingdom.* He cloaths us with raiment fairer and purer, infinitely richer and more valuable than human art can form, or the most costly materials on earth can furnish out ; purity of heart, sanctity of character, and a robe woven with all the graces of the spirit of God, and the sacred dispositions of piety and virtue, and by causing us to appear in the very image of God, and to wear the resemblance of the most high. He puts us into possession of the true riches, those *which neither moth nor rust can corrupt*, and which neither violence or fraud can disseize us of ; riches of truth and grace ; *peace of conscience and peace with God ; joy in the Holy Ghost, and hope of glory*, and hath given us an unalienable title to *an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, that fadeth not away, and that is re-*

served in Heaven for us. These are thy gifts, O Jesus, thou Son of the living God ! Thus shall it be done unto those whom thou honourest with thy friendship ! Admit us to this honour, and we have all that our highest ambition can reach to, and are sure of every thing our hearts can desire, or that can contribute to our happiness ; for then *whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all shall be ours, for we are Christ's, and Christ is God's* *.

It is farther no small advantage that arises from the *friendship* of earthly kings and princes, that it secures those who enjoy it an *admission into the presence*, and intitles them to the distinguishing liberty of *personal converse*. This was the peculiar happiness of the Apostles and disciples of Christ, when he personally ministered on earth, when they heard his words, saw his wonderful works, had recourse to him for instruction, and received all the consolation of his promises and grace. And though this be a privilege now above our condition, now he is in Heaven, and we are sojourners on earth, yet still methinks we may converse with him in the history of his life, and the revelation of his gospel, as though we were actually present with him. When we read the accounts that are left of him, faith and meditation will renew those former scenes, and presentiate to our minds these

* 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23.

past events, and with what pleasures may we imagine ourselves his auditors, sitting at his feet, learning from him divine wisdom, and *bearing the gracious things that proceeded out of his lips!* How easily may we follow him in our minds in all his travels, and rejoice with the blind man when restored to sight, with the lame when recovered to the use of their limbs, with demoniacks when returned to soundness of mind, with the diseased when healed of all their maladies, with the dead when raised to new life, with the hungry, fainting multitude, when fed and satisfied with heavenly bread, and with the conscious, trembling sinner, when pronounced pardoned and accepted with his God. Can'st thou not, Christian, I know thou can'st, for thou hast often done it at *his table*, trace him yet farther, through all that dreadful scene of sufferings that he endured, from the malice, rage, and impiety of his enemies, when his professed friend betrayed him with a treacherous kiss, all his disciples forsook him and fled, and God his Father seemed to have deserted him, and leave him entirely to the power and fury of those who had sworn his destruction. Follow him to the chief Priests and Rulers, to *Herod's* court, to *Pilate's* tribunal, to *Golgotha* the place of suffering, and see with what patience he endured the vilest indignities, with what intrepid resolution he owned himself the Son of God, and promised Messiah, and with what resignation he offered himself *as a lamb to the*

slaughter, without reproaching his persecutors, and breathing his last with a generous prayer for their forgiveness, and a kind apology for their guilt, from their knowing not what they did. A serious believing mind will interest itself in all these transactions, and present them to itself, as though they were actually present. But thou wilt not I am sure, Christian, leave thy Saviour in the grave, nor let thy faith and hope there lie buried with him. See the trembling earth proclaim *his victory over death*, the angels of God declaring his resurrection, the keepers of his grave astonished and deserting their appointed station, the Chief Priests confounded and enraged, his disciples rejoicing to see their master returned to a new life, and made witnesses to his ascension into the kingdom, presence, and glory of his father. In all these transactions we may, by a serious review of them, become almost personally present, and by admitting the consideration of them deeply into our minds, we may awaken all the same variety of sentiments and passions, as though we had been actually witnesses to these important and astonishing events. All this however doth not come up to the actual *admission into his presence*, and *seeing* and conversing with him in person, *face to face*. But rejoice, Christian, this honour is reserved also for thee, *if thou doest whatsoever he hath commanded thee*. Though now thou *seest him* not, thou *lovest him*, and *rejoicest* in him. Hereafter thou shalt *see him*,

him, whom thy soul loveth, and love him more when thou rejoicest in the nearest approaches to his person and glory. The day is coming when the Heavens must restore him, when *he shall come in the clouds of Heaven*, encompassed with his Father's glory, and surrounded with the *angels* of his presence; when *every eye shall see him*, and thine eye shall behold him seated on his judgment seat; when his mouth shall pronounce thee *pardoned and accepted*, when his arms shall embrace thee as his genuine disciple, and his reward distinguish thee as *a good and faithful servant*; when thou shalt see him as he is, and when thou seest him, wonder to see thyself transformed into his image, and appear in his glory; when he shall present thee *holy and blameless before his Father's presence with exceeding joy*, and thy joy shall be unutterable, to see thyself thus honoured by the Friend and Saviour of mankind, and find thyself allowed to dwell *forever with the Lord*. Then shall the mutual *friendship* between Christ and his faithful followers, and between God and them, be confirmed by the seal of Heaven, and rendered *immutable and eternal*. Then shall the true worth, and infinite advantage of being the friends of Christ be fully understood, when all that Heaven can give us shall be put into our possession, and all that God can bestow advance our happiness to the highest perfection. Oh! how honourable, how infinitely desirable is this friendship of Christ! Life is not life without it.

Better be blotted out of being, than blotted out from the number of his friends. Would you live and die amongst the favourite number? Do what he hath commanded you. He owns none as his friends but the *obedient* and *faithful*. For this is the constitution irrevocably fixed: *If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love **.



* John xv. 10.

SERMON

S E R M O N XIV.

Godliness explained and recommended,

I TIMOTHY iv. 8.

Godliness is profitable for all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

WHO is not influenced by the prospect of advantage, and what wise man is there, who will not pursue those methods, which he looks on as conducive to his best and highest interest? As it reflects no credit upon any man's understanding, not to know wherein his true happiness consists; so 'tis no recommendation of his religion, that it makes him drop all regard to it, and works him up into such an enthusiasm of disinterested zeal, as causes him to renounce all consideration of his own welfare, as a motive to the service of God, and the practice of virtue.

Practicing virtue for *virtue's sake*, and being religious out of a *simple* view to the *glory of God*, wholly abstracted from the happy consequences of them to ourselves, are motives

tives very near a kin to each other, supported by the same kind of thin spun arguments, and equally conducive to promote the interest of real piety and goodness. And though christianity hath been represented, as a sort of *mercenary* scheme, because it allures men to embrace and submit to it, by the promises of very great and durable *rewards*; yet the objection would have been much stronger against it, and urged, I doubt not, with great assurance and triumph, by the enemies of revelation, if there had been *no recompence* insured by it; who would not have failed to represent it, as a cold and comfortless institution, without power or efficacy to persuade, and highly unworthy to be embraced by men, in whom the principle of self love is essential, and inseparable from their natures, and who can never renounce or sacrifice the true interest of their being, without being chargeable with shameful ignorance, rash presumption, and incurable folly?

The pretence for being religious merely for God's glory, and without regarding the happy effects of it in reference to ourselves, is built upon the false supposition, that the *glory of God* and the *happiness of his creatures*, may, or do stand in *opposition* to each other. For if they do not, then whatever contributes to the one promotes the other also, and the serving God to promote his glory, is equally serving him for our own profit and advantage. Not to add, that if the supposition of being religious

gious solely for his glory, excludes all regard to his approbation, acceptance, and favour, as this would be a real instance of madness and impiety, it is impossible it can ever be a real requirement, or recommendation of true religion. If on the other hand, we may and ought to have respect to the divine acceptance and favour, the boast of being religious only for God's glory hath no reality and truth to support it, since the favour of God is attended with the highest advantages throughout every period of our duration.

In like manner, if *virtue* is to be practised for *itself*, the meaning must be, if it be a good one, because of its intrinsic, unalterable, natural propriety and fitness, its eternal excellency and worth, and because it wants nothing external to recommend it, nothing but what arises out of itself, and is necessarily connected with its essential principles and duties. On this supposition the *tendencies* and *consequences* of virtue must be taken into our account, as the very propriety and excellency of it can never be accounted for, but by the effects of it, and its direct and certain tendencies to preserve the good order, peace and welfare of societies, and its influence to secure the dignity, to promote the usefulness, to enlarge the mind, and to prepare for self enjoyment, to furnish out the most pleasing reflections, and effectually to provide for the entire welfare of every individual. The consequence of which is, that to love virtue for
itself,

itself, is to love it because it is *beneficial* to ourselves ; and therefore every one may be very disinterestedly virtuous, or virtuous for the sake of virtue, who loves and practises it for the sake of those blessed consequences which it hath a certain tendency to produce.

No doubt, but that if the advantages and *rewards* that we propose as our great inducements to religion and virtue, are in their nature *mean* and *unworthy*, such as have no connection with, and do not arise out of these things themselves ; such as may be, and frequently are very powerful inducements to vice and folly, and such as ought to be sacrificed, whenever the interest of religion and virtue require it ; the acting merely upon such motives in those great concerns, is base and dishonourable, and argues such a mercenary and contemptible spirit, as is highly criminal in its nature, and entirely takes away every thing venerable, excellent, and sacred, from the most specious appearances of piety and goodness ; because in such cases these appearances are not founded in truth, are consistent with the greatest corruption and depravity of heart, and will be of no longer continuance than the lucre that arises from them ; or when that draws a contrary way, will naturally lead into practices utterly inconsistent with and destructive of the obligations and duties of religion and virtue. On the contrary, when the *motives* to both arise from an inward approbation of them, a prevailing

vailing love to them, and the happy consequences that arise out of them, and that are connected with that favour and friendship of God which invariably rewards them ; these are evidently religious and virtuous motives, are dictated by principle, argue a prevailing integrity of mind, are reasonable in themselves, and therefore our acting under the influence of them must be acceptable to that great and good being, who formed us for happiness, and is willing that we should diligently pursue and finally secure it.

It is upon this principle, that the Apostle in my text encourages us to the practice of true religion, by the glorious encouragement and assurance of its being universally beneficial to us, in every valuable interest of our being. *Godliness is profitable for all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. Bodily exercise profits little.* Every thing external in or by which men can busy themselves, is but of little avail to their real happiness. Should they exercise themselves, and even become victors in the *sacred games*, the reward, the prize of victory would be insignificant in itself, and but of short duration to the possessors. Should they weary themselves in external rites and ceremonies, and practice the greatest bodily severities and abstinences, what would it contribute towards their acceptance with God, or how promote their final salvation ? 'Tis godliness and that alone, the thing itself, not the bare name or shew of it, the reality and substance,

substance, not the shadow or form of it, that is universally and invariably *profitable*; for besides its own natural tendency to secure all the most valuable interests of our beings, it hath the farther *promise* from God of the *life that now is*, and of *that which is to come*. In speaking to these words I shall consider,

I. The *nature* of that *godliness* of which our Apostle speaks. And

II. Shew you how it is *profitable* for all things.

I. I am to consider the *nature* of that *godliness* which the Apostle here speaks of. The original word properly signifies the right or *true worship of God*, and therefore supposes some acquaintance with and *knowledge of him*; some just conceptions of his nature, attributes, works and providence, because genuine piety, and the rational, acceptable worship of God depend on, and can never be supported without it. All the false objects of worship, during the prevalence of Heathenism, and all the absurd and impious idolatries and superstitions that obtained in the *Gentile* world, owed their rise and continuance to mistaken sentiments, and a prevailing *ignorance* of the true God; and the same causes will ever be attended with the same effects; absurd and mistaken notions of God necessarily producing answerable absurdities in the worship of him, and being destructive of the spirit of a pure, acceptable devotion and piety.

This

This consists in the *right disposition* and frame of the *mind* towards God ; such a disposition, as the firm belief of his being, attributes, universal providence, and moral government, frequently attended to, and duly impressed on the mind, will create and establish, and which is generally expressed in Scripture by the comprehensive phrase of the *fear of God*. Thus *Cornelius* is said to be a *devout man*, or, since the word is the same as in my text, a godly man ; after which 'tis added, by way of explication, that *he feared God* †. And thus, what we justly render from the Hebrew, *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*, the Greek version renders : *Piety to God is the beginning of wisdom* ; as though piety, godliness, devotion, and the fear of God, were *equivalent* expressions. And indeed they are so ; for this *fear of the Lord*, which the sacred writings speak of, as comprehensive of the whole of religion, implies in it all those sacred dispositions and affections of soul towards him, which the consideration of his infinitely perfect and glorious character, and the various relations he sustains in reference to us, so justly challenge and deserve ; that humble sense of our dependence on him, which becomes us as the creatures of his power, and absolutely subject to the disposals of his good pleasure ; that holy reverence and awe, which the consideration of his infinite rectitude, majesty, and glory should ever

† Acts x. 2.

excite and preserve alive in our minds ; that filial affection and esteem, which is due to him as our father, friend, preserver, and bountiful benefactor ; that humble confidence and trust in him, which his never failing power, goodness, truth, and faithfulness render him so highly worthy of ; that submission to his will, and unreserved resignation to the disposals of his providence, that ought perpetually to possess us, upon account of his constant concern for our welfare, and the equity and unerring wisdom of all his dispensations ; and, finally, that dread of offending him, and that solicitude and care to approve ourselves to, and be accepted of him, which the infinite importance of his favour to our welfare, both in time and eternity, render both our interest and duty. These dispositions are essential in their very nature to constitute true piety and godliness. It is what our blessed Saviour calls, *worshipping the Father in spirit and truth* ; *in spirit*, as it is properly the worship of the reasonable mind ; and *in truth*, as it is that worship of God, which is founded in the eternal reason and fitness of things, in opposition to all superstition and idolatry, and every external form and ceremony that is not accompanied with these internal sentiments and affections, in which the life and power of true godliness consist ; and what therefore is necessarily and immutably the duty of every reasonable being, and for the same reasons, and upon the same foundations, as any other moral virtue

virtue or duty that can be mentioned.
But then,

As all the internal dispositions and affections of the mind, have their proper fruits, by which they discover their life and influence; *godliness* therefore farther implies all those *external actions*, that are *expressive* of our *inward devotion* towards God, and to which the affections, essential to true godliness, when terminated on the great object of worship, do naturally and powerfully excite. Benevolence and charity, when real and prevalent, will exert themselves in all suitable instances of actual goodness; and if justice and temperance are formed within us into rooted and permanent habits, sobriety of life, and righteousness of conduct, will certainly become an essential part of our character. In like manner, if *sentiments* of unfeigned godliness *possess our minds*, and the principles and habits of genuine piety enter into and form our governing temper, there will be the *natural and proper indications* of them, and they will not fail to express themselves by all those instances of reverence and devotion towards God, which arise out of them, and are inseparably connected with them; *by humbly adoring* his infinite majesty, *serious prayer* for his protection and blessing, *grateful thanksgivings* and affectionate praises for the innumerable instances of his goodness, *solemn recollections of the riches of his grace* in the redemption of the world by Christ, and *attending* on all *those sacred services*, in which these best

principles may be recalled to his consideration, impressed on his mind, and rendered more effectual to confirm and establish him in his own purposes of submission and obedience to God ; and by which the knowledge and fear of God, and the practice of universal righteousness may be best promoted and kept up in the world, amongst all ranks and degrees of men. The question with a truly religious person will be ; not, of what benefit these and such like performances will be to God, for they need not be informed that they can be of none ; not, what alteration can they make in the purposes of his will, because they know he is absolutely unchangeable ; but are these things *reasonable in themselves*, are they *suited to my character* and condition, as a dependent and greatly obliged creature, are they *enforced by the authority* and command of God, have they the *sanction* of the *greatest and best examples* throughout all ages of the world, and are they in themselves and natural tendencies, likely and *probable methods of promoting in me* that disposition and character, which are necessary to my final happiness in the favour of God ? If they are, as they certainly are, all objections against them, are of no force, and ought to make no impressions on the minds, nor to have any influence on the religious behaviour of wise and good men. But I would farther observe on this subject,

That every *social, humane virtue* may be considered as an *essential part* of the character of
of

a *godly man*, and may be *exalted* by him into a real instance of *acceptable religion* and *piety*. Although religion, properly so called, both in temper and practice, may be certainly included under the general name of *righteousness*, or *moral virtue*, yet 'tis not true on the contrary, that every instance of *moral virtue* is necessarily and always an act of religion ; because any such may be performed without any reference to God, and when they are to be performed, cannot be any instances of reverence or devotion to him. But as persons of real religion *acknowledge God in all their ways*, they dignify and exalt *moral virtue*, and consecrate even human goodness into a sacred sacrifice of genuine and acceptable piety ; because they observe all the great duties of morality, which arise out of their relation to and connection with men, not only because they are strictly reasonable and fit in themselves, but because those relations, upon which their reasonableness and natural obligation depend, are of the creation and *appointment of God*, and because these duties are for this reason evidently *the orderance of God*, and agreeable to his will. So that the same action being performed, as reasonable in itself, and as an instance of reverence to the authority and commands of God, is both *virtue* and *piety*, an instance of true morality and genuine godliness. And indeed the *morality* of all actions is *extreamly defective*, where there is *no* proper regard paid to God in the performance of them ; because true

morality takes in all the various relations of men, and the several obligations they are under, and by consequence their relations to God, and the obligations they are under to reverence him, and yield obedience to his will. Godliness therefore comprehends in it all the real instances of social virtue and moral righteousness, that are performed from a prevailing sense of deity, which the desire of approving ourselves to God, and the lively hope and full persuasion, that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him. This leads me

II. To the *second* general, which is to shew you the *unspeakable advantages* that are connected with and inseparable from *true godliness*; or genuine religion in principle, disposition, and practice; what are the profits and gains that arise out of real piety and virtue. The Apostle tells us, *that godliness with contentment is great gain* *, and in my text, *that it is profitable for all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.* It hath a natural tendency to procure us every needed good, and is conducive to happiness in every circumstance of our being, and throughout the whole of our duration, and will invariably promote and secure it, if its influences are not, by weakness or wickedness, unnaturally prevented. Let it be considered here

* 1 Tim. vi. 6.

That *godliness* naturally *creates* and *fixes* the *genuine disposition for happiness* in every mind that submits to the power and influence of it. True happiness is not the arbitrary creature of a capricious and fickle imagination, but hath its proper and certain causes, from whence it flows as a necessary effect and consequence. The source of it is internal, seated originally in the mind, in the state of its passions, and the nature of those affections and habits, that influence and govern it ; on which account the wise author of the Proverbs assures us, *that a good man is satisfied from himself*. If the affections are misplaced, irregular, intemperate, or unnatural, happiness is so far in the very nature of things never to be obtained, to be purchased at no price, nor to be extracted from the most valuable objects we can be in possession of. If, on the contrary, the state of our passions be regular, that they are directed to the most excellent and deserving objects, if they are proportioned in their exercise and influence to the real worth of those things on which they respectively terminate, if they are under due controul, and subject to the unerring conduct of truth and reason : In a word, if we indulge none that are unnatural and criminal, if those which are natural be kept within the bounds of moderation and prudence, and if there be none of those generous affections wanting, that reason and principle excite and justify ; happiness is then near us, it dwells within our very bosoms, and we

cannot possibly miss the invaluable treasure. Now that godliness, which the gospel of Christ recommends, as far as it influences and prevails over men, will prove a sure and friendly source of the most sincere and valuable happiness, for it will absolutely destroy and extirpate every unnatural and criminal affection; it being impossible for any thing of this kind to live and flourish in that heart that is consecrated by piety to God, and in full possession of those heavenly graces of which true religion supposes and includes the habitual exercise. And as it thus subdues and eradicates every unworthy passion and affection, so it regulates and moderates all the natural and lawful ones, restraining them from fixing upon improper objects, and from growing warm and intemperate, where the due exercise of them is allowable and useful; for as religion elevates the affections to those things which are of the noblest worth and importance, and directs their principal force and strongest tendency towards them, as their proper rest and center, their bias towards every thing of an inferior, secondary nature and worth, must be proportionally less precipitate and violent. And, finally, whatsoever those dispositions and affections are, from whence a truly rational, solid, and lasting happiness can flow, or which in the exercise of them can any ways contribute to the dignity and proper enjoyment of human life, religion necessarily excites, cultivates, strengthens, and preserves them.

them. Faith and hope, trust and confidence, affection and complacency, benevolence and goodness; in a word, all the divine and human virtues, that are seated in the heart, and form the temper of a godly man, either produce that serenity, calmness and peace of mind, which constitute a gentle, easy, flowing happiness, or else that triumph and rejoicing of soul, which hath a somewhat more impetuous pleasure attending it; and afford delights that are more warm and transporting, but which can never grow immoderate, or be attended with any danger of running into forbidden and criminal excesses. So that *godliness* may with the greatest truth be said to be *profitable for all things*, or conducive in every respect to the advantage of mankind, as it universally and invariably *forms* by its own natural tendency, the *genuine disposition* for our *highest happiness*, and will be *productive of it*, where there is nothing to check and prevent the influence and efficacy of it. But farther,

This *godliness* not only produceth the temper and capacity for happiness, but also *secures those invaluable advantages and substantial blessings*, which nothing else can yield, and of which nothing can wholly or finally deprive those who are in possession of them. These advantages relate

To the *whole of our frame*, for the happy influences of religion reach to our bodies and souls. It is friendly to the welfare and interest of our *bodies*; as it is an effectual pre-

servative from all those excesses and violences that tend to weaken and destroy them, and the surest preventive of those pains and disorders, that weaken and torment them; as it powerfully calms those fears, and eases men of those cares, which prey upon their vitals, depress their spirits, and sometimes overwhelm them with misery and death; as it composes the mind, and subdues all that inordinacy and violent agitation of the passions, which disorder the frame, and thereby preserves and even encreases the strength and vigour of the constitution. And as to the *mind*, the benefits accruing to it from the habitual prevalence of a godly disposition, exerting itself in all the genuine effects, are of the highest and most valuable nature. For it ennobles all the powers of it, by directing them to, and employing them on the most excellent and worthy objects, consecrates all the affections of it to the highest and best purposes, cultivates and perfects all those heavenly graces, in the possession of which, the real dignity and amiableness of it consist, secures those pleasing reflections that yield it the most grateful entertainment, introduces into it the purest and most satisfying pleasures, flowing from the most worthy and permanent sources, and as it opens its prospects into the most distant futurity, and strengthens the hopes of the most durable blessedness and glory. I add farther,

Godliness is profitable for all things, as the advantages of it run through every stage, and
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enter into every condition of human life; for there are no circumstances or periods of our beings, to which the blessed influences of it do not extend, and largely contribute to the safety and comfort of it. If it enters into *childhood*, as sometimes through the blessings of God rewarding the care of a good education, it doth, what favour doth it conciliate, what tenderness of affection doth it engage, what beauty and loveliness doth it impress! Like an early blossom enriched and impearled with the dews of Heaven, the beauty of which is heightened and enlivened by the lustre that sparkles in it, and which breathes fragrancy and sweetness to all around it. In *youth* it is a sure *preservative* from the most dangerous and destructive snares, the *safest guide* into success and prosperity, the best *defence* of innocence and integrity, the highest evidence of good sense and a sound understanding, the noblest ornament to grace and distinguish us, the wisest method to secure an interest in life, and maintain it, and the only effectual means of a growing reputation and increasing usefulness. In the middle stage of life, it is a permanent source of the most valuable satisfactions, suitably employs and exercises all the passions, when the youthful heat and warmth of them is subsided and spent, adds a peculiar relish to every enjoyment, and teaches how to use the bounties of Heaven with a becoming moderation, gratitude and dignity. In old age it strengthens the soul under all the necessary
decays

decays of nature, refreshes and cheers it, when the blood runs slow, and the pulse begins to languish, feeds it with pleasure by reflections on what is past, and delightful prospects and anticipations of much better things to come, and renders it truly venerable in itself, amiable in the sight of men, and pleasing in the estimation of God himself. Like a tree bending under the weight of its ripened fruit, or a garden richly adorned, in which every flower and plant is grown up to full maturity and perfection. In prosperity it cloaths with moderation and humility, inspires with benevolence and generosity, excites to usefulness and acts of kindness, warms the heart with gratitude, dictates adoration and praise to the fountain of all good, sweetens every enjoyment, adds a relish to possession, settles the mind by hope and trust above the anxious fears of future disappointment and want, and is attended with the chearful desire and prospect of a better and more durable inheritance. In all kind of afflictions it is the most effectual cordial, and affords the most sensible relief, produces patience under pain, submission and calmness under distemper, resignation and hope under disappointments and losses, light in the darkest gloom, intervals of chearfulness under the deepest melancholy, and in that most important and needful moment, when flesh and heart begin to fail us, and we shall see an end of all created perfection, fetches in supports from him who is the eternal, uncre-
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ated good, and thereby causes the soul to triumph over death in its nearest approaches, and to rejoice in the near view of life and immortality, with a joy unspeakable and full of glory. For,

In the last place, the *advantages* of a real and undissembled *godliness reach beyond the grave*, extend to the whole possibility of our existence, and are commensurate with eternity itself. We cannot indeed assure ourselves from reason, nor demonstrate by any train of certain consequences, that God is obliged in justice to reward the temporary piety and virtue of any of his creatures, even supposing it blameless and perfect, with an *exceeding and eternal weight of happiness and glory*. However, this is an inference of truth, that every man, rightly using his reason, would naturally draw ; that the disposition and life of genuine godliness must be as acceptable to God, as well in the future, as in the present state ; and that as he cannot but approve it, he will not fail to distinguish and reward it by some suitable and peculiar marks of his favour. And therefore let the duration of our being be ever so extensive, that sincere piety and virtue which God approves, must be of as lasting advantage to it, and the benefits attending it reach throughout every period of our existence. The *change of worlds* can make no *alteration* in the *nature and consequences of things* ; the religious temper, the affections of a mind devoted to and terminated on God, and the disposition formed by the

the love and fear of him, by faith and hope in his power and goodness, and by that universal benevolence and righteousness, which impress us with a divine image and likeness, these things can never lose their intrinsic worth, wherever they dwell, and of how long continuance soever they may be, will ever remain the same natural sources of happiness, and equally worthy the friendly regards and approbation of God. So that godliness must be universally profitable, as in its own nature it tends to perpetuate our happiness in every possible state of our existence. And this sentiment is confirmed by the doctrine of revelation, which assures us, that *it hath the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.* It gives us the assurance of immortality, and of *a blessedness incorruptible, and that fadeth not away.* So that both the nature of the thing, and promise of God conspire to establish us in this pleasing assurance, that a religious life shall be an happy one, and that the gains of godliness are both temporal and eternal.

How glorious a recommendation is this of Christian piety and virtue, when we thus consider it in its immediate and certain connection with all the most valuable interests of our beings in every state and period of their duration. The love and desire of happiness is natural to all men, and God himself is pleased with our most diligent pursuit of it. How careful therefore should we be to direct our views aright, and to seek it
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from those pure and living springs, from whence alone we can derive it. How diligently should we cultivate all those sacred dispositions towards God and man, of which our certain relations to both demonstrate the reasonableness and propriety ! Especially when we remember, that we are hereby strengthening the foundations and encreasing the causes of our own felicity, and more effectually securing the uninterrupted and eternal possession of it. By this means every individual would be blessed in himself, and social life, in the larger and lesser branches of it, would be filled with innocence, purity and peace. The blessing of the Almighty would shine upon our tabernacles, every mind would be full of joy, every family an habitation of comfort, and after the enjoyment of these lesser transitory advantages, the same God, who hath trained us up for an immortal state, will bring us to the possession of that unchangeable world, where, from the never ceasing communications of his bounty, our happiness shall be fully satisfying to our natures, and permanent as that eternal fountain from whence it flows.

S E R M O N X V .

Genuine Piety essential to present
Happiness.

I TIMOTHY iv. 8.

*Godliness is profitable for all things, having the
promise of the life that now is, and of that
which is to come.*

IF I was particularly to repeat to you all the several Passages of Scripture, that limit the hope and gift of salvation to the steady, habitual practice of righteousness, and that holiness of heart and life, to which our Christian principles lead us, and the example and doctrine of Christ oblige us ; and that expressly and peremptorily exclude from all the benefits of redemption, and the heavenly inheritance and glory, all the workers of iniquity, who have defiled themselves with the great transgressions of life, and lived in a course of wilful and presumptuous sins ; it would take up more time than is allotted for the present service ; for passages of this nature abound in every page of our bibles,
and

and there is nothing more frequently and seriously inculcated in divine revelation than this ; that the workers of iniquity shall be finally rejected from the kingdom of God, and that 'tis necessary we should *have our fruit unto holiness, that the end may be life everlasting.*

But so it happens, that some of our *modern spiritual Physicians* have a *quicker* way of healing their diseased and miserable patients, and an easier method of saving the souls of sinners from condemnation and death. Let them be loaded with ever so many enormous crimes, and have spent their whole past lives in the practice of those wicked works, that argue a settled enmity to God, yet in a few days they can wash them as white as snow, fill them with assurance of salvation, even when receiving the punishment due to their offences from human justice, and give them an immediate and sure passage, through every obstacle, to the heavenly happiness and glory.

'Tis but *believing*, it seems, and all is *secure* ; and raising in themselves a firm persuasion and confidence that they shall be saved, and they become instantly heirs to eternal life and glory. Christ, they are told, hath done every thing for them, and therefore all their past vices and impurities, and their having been entire strangers to the Christian temper and character, is no kind of bar to their obtaining mercy ; for as to their sins, the blood of Christ will cleanse them

them from them all, and as to their want of all the graces and virtues enjoined by the gospel, and their having been defective in every instance of obedience to God, the *obedience of Christ* is to supply the room of it, and in his righteousness they are to be righteous, though they have been utterly destitute of all righteousness themselves.

If this doctrine could be true, you may go on, Christians, in your *sins* without fear, and live regardless of God and goodness without danger. In a few days, at the close of life, when you can sin no longer, you may retrieve all, and one act of faith in Christ, as your Saviour, if you can work yourselves up to it, will be a sufficient passport to his blessed kingdom and presence. And indeed there is but *one objection* to this comfortable doctrine, that is of any great importance, and that is : That *it is not, and cannot be true* ; or that if it be true, the doctrine of the *gospel* must certainly be *false*, and an heap of absurdities and contradictions ; which never makes faith in Christ, as that implies a *peremptory belief* and persuasion, *that we shall at all events be saved*, the one great necessary to salvation ; but such a *faith* as shews its life by *good works*, and *obedience* to God's commands ; or, in other words, such a life of uniform, steady piety and virtue, as is the effect of our faith in Christ, and is produced by our belief of and attention to the great doctrines of his gospel. To them, *who have their fruit unto holiness, the end shall be everlasting life*, is an essential

sential truth of divine revelation ; and our blessed Lord, who, one would think, should know the terms of salvation, expressly declares, *that the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth, they who have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation**. And as to the promises of God, my text informs us to what they are limited, and what the character of those persons is to whom they are appropriated. *Godliness is profitable for all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.*

The *godliness* here spoken of, or, as the word signifies, the *right worship of God*, supposes a *competent knowledge* of God, in his perfections, works, and providence, and consists in the *right disposition* of our minds towards him, and the *habitual exercise* of that reverence, affection, gratitude, humility, resignation, trust, hope, and other graces of the good spirit, which discover themselves by their proper and genuine effects, those of solemn adoration, serious prayer, devout thanksgivings, frequent converse with him by reflection and meditation, and attending on all those sacred services, that are proper and necessary to confirm us in our best principles, hopes, and purposes, and excite us to care and diligence in approving ourselves to God, by the practice of all the fruits of righteous-

* John v. 28, 29.

ness. For in how contemptible a light soever some may place the duties of *morality*, or the virtues of justice, humanity, charity, temperance, chastity, meekness, and others of the like nature, yet no man can be a truly godly man, that is not a moral one ; and when our good works, or the virtues we practice are performed out of reverence and love to God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ for final acceptance and salvation, they then contract a double worth, and are instances of *pure and undefiled religion*, and of genuine and acceptable piety to God, equally with any instances of devotion, that we can engage in the performance of.

Now this *godliness is profitable to all things*. It hath a *natural tendency* to procure us every needed good, and is conducive to our happiness in every circumstance of our beings. For it invariably *creates and fixes the proper disposition for happiness*, in all who submit to the power and influence of it. The happy influences of it extend to the *whole of our frame*, to all the *best interests of our souls and bodies* ; they reach to *every stage of life*, and enter into all the various circumstances, in which the providence of God can place us in the present world ; and reach to the *longest possibility of our existence*, wheresoever the goodness and wisdom of God may think fit to place us after our death ; because the same dispositions, from which our happiness flows in this world, must produce the same good effects in every other world, and because that
godliness,

godliness, which is honoured with the divine approbation here, must be equally pleasing and acceptable to him hereafter.

But then, as the *natural* consequences of religion and virtue may be, and oftentimes have been *prevented* by *external* accidents, that it is not in human power and wisdom to prevent, the Apostle adds, for our farther encouragement, *that godliness hath the promise of the life that now is* ; that is, the promise of God to secure the true happiness and enjoyment of it. And as death is the extinction of our present life, and *mere reason* can never assure us of the restoration of it, and much less of our recovery to a state of ~~indestructible~~ and never fading happiness and glory, the Apostle farther adds, *that godliness hath the promise* of God, not only of the present life, but of *that which is to come*. So that in what instances soever, the natural consequences of godliness may fail to promote our true happiness, in this or a future world, God by his promise hath engaged to supply the defect, and by his own power and goodness to secure the real welfare of both. Let us consider these things distinctly.

I. *Godliness hath the promise of the life that now is*. It hath been frequently an objection against a religious and godly life, that it is really a very great obstruction to mens present enjoyments, inconsistent with those pleasures which the generality pursue, and sometimes cannot be persevered in, without renouncing and sacrificing all our most valuable

B b 2

interests,

interests, relative to our bodies and the present state. And the objection undoubtedly is so far just, as that it must be acknowledged, that there are many gratifications, which sensual men eagerly pursue, which piety forbids the indulgence of, and that there may be, in some particular seasons, very great inconveniences attending a sincere and steady perseverance in our Christian profession and practice.

And it is farther certain, that whatever be the meaning of *godliness having the promise of the present life*, the Apostle could never intend to assure us, that *worldly riches, honours, and pleasures* should be the *constant recompense* bestowed by God on true religion and virtue. This indeed sometimes doth happen in the course of God's providence, and considering things in their natural connection, piety and true goodness is the most direct and certain way to all that worldly prosperity, which on the whole is best for us, as well as the most effectual method to render it secure and permanent. However, there is no necessary perpetual connection between a life of genuine godliness and temporal prosperity, nor any promise from God, that I know of, always to secure secular advantages, in any remarkable manner, to devotion and the practice of righteousness. The grand encouragements to this are derived from the objects of a *future* state, and the principle that is to direct our whole conduct here, is that of *faith* in the important realities of the unseen and eternal

eternal world. And the good things of the present state are spoken of rather under diminishing characters, as fading temporary objects, that *perish in the using*, that last but for a moment, that are attended with very dangerous temptations and snares, and that oftentimes prove destructive to the possessors of them. And therefore revelation is so far from raising any hopes, or giving any promises of distinguishing worldly prosperity, as that it rather cautions us against pursuing it too eagerly, enjoying it too freely, and placing our proper happiness in it.

However, there is a real and important truth in the words of my text ; that *godliness hath the promise of the life that now is*, or that God hath given many gracious assurances, relative to the interests and happiness of the present life, the accomplishment of which may certainly be depended on, and which religious persons shall experience the truth of, if they are wise to improve the means he is pleased to afford them, for their own advantage and comfort. They may in a particular manner assure themselves :

That their *lives* shall, as to the *continuance and support of them*, be under the *continual care and protection* of God's providence, and whilst they abide by their principles, and remain steadfast in their duty, lengthened out to their full period, *i. e.* till they have answered the great end of life, and whilst the continuance of it shall be for their real benefit and welfare. And this is all a wise man

would desire ; and to wish to live, when God knows that the gratification of such a wish would prove greatly injurious and destructive to us, is the greatest folly, as it is wishing to outlive the only valuable ends of life, viz. the usefulness and happiness of it. Whether we are continued here a longer or shorter period, is in itself of little consequence, and neither argues the favour or displeasure of God. The only circumstance of any real consequence to us, and by consequence that is desirable in its nature, is : *To live long enough to approve ourselves to God, to form ourselves into the right dispositions for happiness*, so that if life be prolonged we may spend it worthily and comfortably, or if the duration of it be shortened, we may be truly prepared for whatever shall be the events of the life and world that is to come. If God preserve us here till this is done, we may be well content, though we are permitted to continue here no longer, and to remove wherever the good pleasure of God shall see fit to transplant us. And such an assurance of life God hath really given to piety and virtue in the gospel revelation. This is the express promise of our Lord himself : *Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet their heavenly father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they ? Consider the lillies of the field, how they grow, they toil not, neither do they spin. And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one* of

of these. Wherefore if God so cloath the grass of the field, which to day is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more cloath you, O ye of little faith? Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you *. In these words, God having made men of a more excellent nature than the lillies of the field and the fowls of Heaven, is laid down by our blessed Lord, as a *solid reason* and certain proof of their being under the *immediate* care and guardianship of providence, and that God would concern himself to uphold them in life, and provide for them the necessary supports of it, whilst they are in the way of their duty, and 'till they have finished the service to which God hath appointed them. And men of sincere piety have peculiar reason to assure themselves of a continued interest in the divine protection, for the security of their lives, more than all the rest of mankind, who governing themselves by their passions and sensual affections, and walking in those paths of sin, which are his abhorrence, have reason to fear their being left to the consequences of their own follies, and that they shall fall a prey to those destructive evils to which they voluntarily expose themselves. Whereas righteous and godly men, may, from the general ends and reasons of providence, as well as from the especial promises made them, assure themselves of the security and continuance of life, whilst

* Matt. vi. 26.

life is worth the having, as long as they are capable of rightly improving it, and the farther continuance of it would not expose them to any dangerous and destructive evils. So that *godliness* hath the *promise of this life*, as it is a real security to religious persons, that God will never suffer them to be cut off by such an *untimely* and immature death, as would prove unfriendly to their best interest and happiness; but amidst all the various dangers of life, to which they may be exposed, will either enable them entirely to escape these, or preserve them from all their destructive effects, 'till he knows it is for their advantage to give them a final deliverance, by removing them into that better state of existence, where they shall never be molested or endangered by them any more. With such a promise, who need be anxious about life? "Under the divine protection no destruction can come near me. I know I shall live, and not die, as long as I wish to live, *i. e.* as long as God knows life is best for me, and longer methinks one would not indulge a single wish to protract it." Again,

Godliness hath the promise of the life that now is, as it is an effectual *preservative* from all the *great occasions and sources of unhappiness and misery*, and as it hath the assurance of God, that he will be their *guardian and protector* from them. From whence proceed the greatest distresses and uneasiness of human nature? What is the real cause of mens being involved in wretchedness and destruction?

destruction? Is it the arbitrary and severe appointment of God? Is it because he takes pleasure in their anguish and ruin? Is it his agency and providence that hath introduced so many evils into the world, and exposed human life to such an infinite variety of calamities, that perpetually infest it? No. God is blameless. The source of these things is to be sought elsewhere, and men are their own tormentors and destroyers. God hath created all things for good, and if men would follow the direction of his providence and word, the miseries of mankind would in great measure immediately cease, and happiness soon return to us from her native heaven, to smile on, and bless again the inhabitants of our world. But if men will cherish the causes of their own unhappiness, contrary to the will of God, how can they escape that misery which they thus bring upon themselves? If they will cherish those corrupt passions and affections, which they ought to suppress, they must be drawn into those inconveniences and evils, which when they feel they would be glad to be delivered from. If they will indulge to criminal pleasures, and enter into all the methods of sin and folly, they must feel, in their intervals of reflection, all that remorse of conscience, and those cutting reflections of their own minds, which the sense of guilt naturally and constantly produces. If they will needlessly expose themselves to the danger of powerful temptations, they must expect to fall

fall by them, and reap the destructive consequences. If they will live without any care to prepare for death, it is no wonder they should be in perpetual *bondage, through the fear of it*. In a word, the consequences of sin and folly are, in their nature, unfriendly to mankind, and if we cherish the causes of our own misery, we put it, as far as we can, out of the power of God himself to prevent it. But now godliness hath the sure promise of the gospel of being effectually guarded from all these aggravated distresses. It supposes that the habits of sin are in some good measure broken, and it hath the assurance, *that he who hath begun the good work, will carry it on to greater perfection, and fully compleat it in the day of Christ* * ; and as our deliverance from these grows more intire, the sources of unhappiness proportionably diminish, and the mind becomes more and more disposed to be comfortable and blessed. Even men of religion and piety have their errors to acknowledge, and that give them some uneasy moments. But then they have their relief from the divine promise, that God will justify them freely by his grace, and that being recovered from sin, they shall be finally saved from condemnation, and therefore are free from all those aggravated terrors, to which the sense of unpardoned guilt must necessarily expose them. They are encompassed with temptations equally with other

* Phil. i. 6.

men, from the snares of life, and the circumstances of the world around them. But then 'tis their happiness, that they are not equally endangered by them. For they have the comfortable promise, *that God is faithful, who will not suffer them to be tempted above what they are able, but will with the temptation also make a way for their escape, that they may be able to bear it* * ; and being thus assured, that the grace of God will be sufficient for them, they chearfully commit themselves to the divine protection, sure either to escape the danger of temptation, or the guilt and misery that follows by being overcome, and complying with it. As *godliness* is the best ornament, and truest improvement of life, so it is in its nature the *best preparation for death*, and the promise assures us, that he who lives by the Christian faith *shall not die eternally*, is passed from condemnation to life, and *being made meet for*, shall finally become partaker of the *inheritance of the Saints in light*. So that he is relieved and comforted under the thoughts and approach of death, and can possess his mind in peace in those moments, when habitual and impenitent sinners are destitute of every consideration to support them, and betray a thousand uneasy apprehensions of what shall befall them, in that future state of existence, into which they are entering by death. In a word, *godliness* is effectually secured by the promise of

* 1 Cor. x. 13.

God from every real evil to which human nature is incident, and that can be finally destructive of its proper happiness. Again,

Godliness hath the promise of the present life, inasmuch as it hath the assurance, that all the various events of it shall be so over-ruled by the providence of God, as to contribute to the present comfort and happiness of those who follow after and practise it. In many respects, as to external circumstances, *all things happen alike to all*, and the good as well as the bad experience promiscuously the different effects of prosperity and adversity; the worthiest Christians being sometimes under great trials and afflictions, and others of them in possession of all the valuable advantages of the present state, just as other men are, who live entire strangers to the life and power of godliness. But how great are the advantages ensured to true piety, in these various conditions, by the express promise of God, in which those of a different character have no interest whatsoever! For to these latter prosperity is a snare, brings them into powerful temptations, that corrupt and prepare them for destruction, alienate their hearts from God, and render them utterly thoughtless of, and unprepared for eternal salvation. And when they are in circumstances of affliction and distress, they have no considerations to relieve them, no prospects to revive them, no promise of God to take refuge in, no heart or knowledge rightly to improve them, nor any reason to
promise

promise themselves, that the event shall be comfortable and happy to them. But what saith the promise to religious and good men? Can there be a more comfortable assurance than that of the Apostle? *All things work together for good to them that love God* *. And what pleasure may we take in the various circumstances of life, in which providence hath placed us, under the influence of this blessed persuasion, *that neither death nor life, nor things present, nor things to come, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus* †. So that if God should please to bring them into circumstances of great prosperity, it shall not prove a snare and a curse to them, and God will enable them to use it with innocence and dignity, and to improve it to the best purposes, the benefit of others, and the increase of their final reward from God. And as to those *afflictions* that may befall them, however grievous they may be in some respects, the intention of them is friendly, and the effect of them shall be beneficial, as they shall be rendered by them *partakers of God's holiness*, and prepare them *for a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*. Well therefore may *godliness* be said to have *the promise of the present life*, in that it hath so kind an influence upon all the various circumstances of our being, and since there is nothing can possibly happen to us, but what God will

* Rom. viii. 28. † 38, 39.

make some way or other contribute its share to our real welfare and happiness. Again,

Godliness hath the promise of this life, as it hath the *assurance of the constant assistance of the spirit and grace of God*, to establish and perfect it, and to aid those who love it and are partakers of it in the discharge of all the important duties of their Christian calling, and enable them to secure their own eternal salvation. Life is of very little importance, considering it only as our capacity for *animal services*, and the enjoyment of merely sensual satisfactions and pleasures. In this view, it is just upon a level with the life of brutes, and answers no more worthy and valuable ends than theirs. What renders us superior to the beasts of the field, and better than the fowls of the air, is our capacity for *rational services*, our being formed for the exercises of religion, for the practice of righteousness, for usefulness in our stations, and for the exalted happiness of a future everlasting existence. And he possesses life in the best manner, and hath infinitely the highest advantage from it, who employs it for these excellent purposes, and improves the season of it in the cultivation of his own mind, serving the most valuable interests of others, approving himself to God, the great author of his being, and *laying a good foundation against the time to come*, in order to secure the possession of eternal life. And what mighty encouragements have sincere Christians to engage them to diligence and activity

activity in the discharge of their duty, and the pursuit of their happiness, from the promises of God in the gospel? If they are conscious to their own imperfections and weakness, and find themselves too unequal to the important services required of them, yet the promise is sufficient to inspire them with resolution, *that God will work in them both to will and to do of his own good pleasure.* If their duty be attended with any peculiar difficulties, the promise of God will render them superior to them all, *that his strength shall be made perfect in their weakness, and that he will establish and settle them.* If at any time they are under uneasy apprehensions with respect to their final safety, and afraid least they should be perverted from the path that leads to happiness, and incur the forfeiture of eternal life; their courage will revive, and their hopes grow chearful, when they recollect the grace of that promise, *that God will never leave them nor forsake them, but preserve them by his power, through faith unto salvation.* And these promises of revelation are agreeable to the perfections and character of God, the best of beings, and are vouchsafed us, for our comfort and support under all the disadvantages of the present state, to assist us in pursuing the great ends of our beings, and render our enquiries after, and pursuit of happiness finally successful. And lastly,

Godliness hath the promise of the life that now is, as it shall certainly prove the means of securing the true possession and enjoyment of it, whilst

whilst it continues, and be a *preparation* and *introduction to the blessings of a better*. They who live in a perpetual dissipation of thought and time, who have no principles to govern them, no good dispositions to influence them, no services of reason to employ them, nor better hopes of futurity to enliven and animate them, do not live, *i. e.* do not properly enjoy life, and cannot have the highest and best relish of it. The happiness of *reasonable* beings must be derived from *reflection* and *disposition*, from right action, from the esteem of those beings with whom we are connected, and on whom we are in any manner dependent for the continuance of life, and the welfare of it. This happiness can only be secured by religion and virtue, and the promise of God gives us full certainty, that happiness shall be the certain consequence of governing ourselves by the principles and rules of them. The comprehensive blessing of human life, and that on which all the real enjoyment of it depends, is the friendship and favour of God, with which every other kind of real good is connected. And this inestimable blessing God hath assured religious persons they shall never be deprived of. *All things are yours*, saith the Apostle, *for you are Christ's and Christ is God's*; through him we are interested in God, as our reconciled God and Father; and he hath said, *I am your God, and you shall be my people*. Now the sense of the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, and the well grounded persuasion, that

that we shall never be forsaken of his goodness, is a circumstance of all others the most grateful and pleasing, and will cause the moments and hours of life to pass on with a cheerfulness of soul, that can arise from no other reflection whatsoever. This belief and assurance will make solitude unspeakably more pleasing than all the gay assemblies for vanity and amusements. This will secure integrity in the conduct of all the secular concerns of life, and that prudence in the management of them that is necessary to success, and that solid comfort that flows from them both. It adds a relish to prosperity itself, when it is considered as the effect of divine goodness, and an earnest of future and higher favours. It produces contentment in humbler circumstances, when regarded as the disposal of a wise and faithful friend, who is engaged to order all things for our benefit and welfare. Under afflictions it produces patience and acquiescence in the will of God, and thus takes away the bitterness of them, and prepares and opens the heart for the consolations of God, that are not small. In the last moments of life, the apprehension and persuasion, that we stand well with God, and are through Christ the objects of his favour, will spread a cheering light *throughout the valley of the shadow of death*, cause us to pass through it with resolution and hope, and look forward to the end of it with joy unspeakable and full of glory. In a word,

the truly religious person, whatever be his situation in life, is fittest to have the truest enjoyment of it. His own principles, his governing dispositions, his future prospects and his interest in God, and the good promises he hath given him, all conspire to render the present life a blessing to him; for on all these accounts the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever *.

From what hath been said we may well infer, of what unspeakable consequence to the happiness of human life the *promises of God by revelation* are; which so clearly ascertains the doctrine of providence, sets it in so clear a view, represents it in so comfortable and friendly light, and assures religious persons of a constant interest in the care of it, and all the affairs of their whole existence shall be under the direction of infinite wisdom and goodness, and ordered for our present and future advantage. This makes life, with all its inconveniences, a real blessing, and is the best ingredient that I know of in the happiness attending it. If I know that providence will be my protection and guide during the few uncertain years I am to abide here, and that the season of life, well employed and improved, will be my introduction into a more perfect and durable

* Isaiah xxxii. 17.

one ; 'tis comparatively of but small importance, what our external circumstances are, or how long or short our duration is in this. This knowledge we can derive only from revelation and promise, and our best reasonings without this aid will be uncertain and unsatisfactory. Let us therefore be thankful for, and cordially embrace these promises, and under the influence of them be careful to *perfect holiness in the fear of God.*



S E R M O N XVI.

Glory, Honour, and Immortality, the
Object of the Christian's Pursuit.

ROMANS ii. 7.

*To them, who by patient continuance in well doing,
seek for Glory, and Honour, and Immortality,
eternal Life.*

NO man hath, properly speaking, the ordering and fixing his own circumstances in life; but whatever his condition may be, if he is a wise man, he will make the best of it, and improve it to the most valuable purposes he can. That all think life a blessing, is evident from their being extremely loth to part with it, and from the care they take to preserve and prolong it; and there cannot be any thing more contrary to reason, and all the rules of true prudence, than for any one voluntarily to shorten the period of his own life, and thereby cut himself wholly off from all that happiness, which, with a right improvement, it might be made to yield him.

If

If our present lives were to determine our existence, and we had no future expectations whatsoever, and it was in our power to pass the time of them with reputation, comfort and happiness, by living as the law of our natures, and the unbiaſſed judgment of our minds ſhould direct us ; though the real importance of life would certainly leſſen, in proportion to the ſhortneſs of its duration ; yet it would certainly be a reaſon why we ſhould protract it to its utmoſt length, and guard againſt every accident that would tend to impair or deſtroy it ? for it is certainly better to be happy, for a comparatively little while, than never to be happy at all, and never permitted to have any exiſtence, throughout the whole immenſity of duration ; and therefore to be happy as long as we can, without defrauding ourſelves, by any wilful imprudence, of any part of the ſeaſon of enjoyment, that nature or providence might think fit to allow us.

But of what *infinitely greater importance* and worth is *human life*, if it is intended by the great Author of it, as an *introduction* into a more *durable* ſtate of exiſtence, and if there be in our nature ſuch an active principle, as is capable of, and form'd for an *everlaſting* duration ; of ſurviving the ruins of the body, and exiſting, exerciſing its rational powers, enjoying its reflections, and ſharing in a much ſuperior kind of happineſs than what the preſent world can afford, and that ſhall be commensurate with eternity itſelf ? How highly would this illuſtrate and recommend

the benevolence and grace of the Almighty Creator; if his own great view, in calling us into being, should be our finally sharing *eternal life*; and if he hath made it the one great business of our transitory continuance here, to seek for a glorious and blessed immortality, hath by his *own promises*, excited and encouraged this blessed hope, and given us the clearest and surest *directions* how we may finally obtain it. If those reasonable spirits that are within us have no principle of corruption and dissolution in them, the dissolution of the body cannot at least affect their existence; they may, and they must live, when the tabernacles they now inhabit shall be levelled with the dust, and continue to exist 'till the great Father of them by his infinite power shall think proper to annihilate them. But as there is nothing in reason to justify such a supposition, I think the conclusion, from God's having created the spirits of men for an immortal duration, is certain and indisputable, that his *original intention* in thus forming them, was their obtaining immortal happiness. And indeed, I should sooner believe, that men were produced by fatality or chance, though nothing can be more absurd than such a supposition, than that they were made by an infinitely wise and good Being, with the original view to their being necessarily and eternally miserable; because I cannot discern either the wisdom or goodness of such a dispensation.

And we may, I think, learn with the greatest certainty what the *original end of creation* was,
by

by considering what was the certain and avowed end of God's sending his Son into the world, which was not to condemn it, but that the world through him might be saved; not because he had appointed mankind to wrath, but from the determined purpose of his goodness, that all who would believe and obey the gospel should obtain redemption by him: For these two great works of God cannot be repugnant to each other, but must necessarily coincide with and be subservient to one another, in the scheme of God's moral providence and government. But as no two purposes can be more inconsistent with and opposite to one another, than those of *destruction* and *redemption*; it appears to me self evident, that as benevolence was the great motive in the divine mind to call mankind into being, and mercy the all powerful motive that formed and executed the plan of their redemption, the original intention of *creation* must be *happiness*, and the capacity for happiness granted, not cruelly to disappoint, but with a god-like generosity to oblige and satisfy it, because it certainly is the end of redemption.

The *seeking after eternal life* is represented by our Apostle as what should be the great view of *mankind in general*; for he tells us, that God will render to every man according to his deeds; to them who by a patient continuance in well doing seek for glory, honour, and immortality, eternal life. Now if it be every man's duty to do well, and continue patient in well doing, it is by this doctrine of the Apostle,

equally his duty to seek after that glory, honour, and immortality, which God hath determined shall be the final reward of it. But it can be no man's duty to *seek after glory, honour and immortality*, if it be what he can never possibly obtain; and therefore not any man's duty to *continue patient in well doing*, who is unavoidably cut off from all share in the recompence attending it. If he is to seek for eternal life by constancy in good works, it can be no more impossible for him to obtain eternal life, than to abound constantly in good works, and if God expects that he should seek after it, it is a demonstration that God is ready to give eternal life, and will finally bestow it to all, who by a steady perseverance in Christian piety and virtue render themselves capable of obtaining it. Oh! how great and excellent is the Christian vocation! How high and dignifying the work of life! What can be a nobler pursuit than immortal glory and honour! What more worthy and rational method of pursuing, than by steadfastness and perseverance in well doing! Let us here consider these two things,

- I. What *that glory, honour, and immortality* are, which are proposed to us, as the great object we are to pursue; and
- II. What *the seeking after them* implies.

I. These words represent to us, in a very pleasing view, the *important business* of human life, that every man should be perpetually employed in, and to which he ought to make his

his whole conduct subservient. 'Tis nothing less than *glory, honour and immortality*. Creation was not the work of humour and caprice, nor of a sudden, accidental dictate of unpremeditating benevolence ; but of mature counsel, directed by infinite wisdom, and intended for the best and noblest purposes. The desire of life, in living, rational beings, is inserted by the God of nature into our frames, and we cannot extinguish it if we would ; and the belief of a future state so naturally arises out of the due exercise of our reason, and is so connected with the belief of a God and his providence, as that it hath universally obtained in all ages, and men find it impossible ever wholly to get rid of it, but either by stupifying their minds and consciences through the excess of vice ; or by endeavouring to persuade themselves that there is no God, which is the excess of folly ; or by denying the exercise and inspection of providence, which is the greatest absurdity, upon the supposition of the real existence of an infinitely wise and gracious God. And if this belief of a future state be so natural to the mind, and thus arises out of the inward convictions of their reason, and their discerned connections with the great Author of nature ; is it not a real proof that he intended men should form this belief, and be led into it by a right and impartial use of their reasonable powers and faculties ? And after all is this belief a false persuasion, when it thus arises out of truth ? Are our best reasonings all fallacious ? Wherein then can we
ever

ever trust them? Or hath God deceived us, and given us reason and judgment only more effectually to impose on us, and necessarily to constrain us to believe what after all our best convictions there really is not any foundation for believing? This appears to me to be a most unworthy sentiment of God, and so dishonourable to his perfections and character, as that it is impossible I should ever be persuaded to receive it.

Besides, let it be consider'd, who are the persons that in all ages have thrown off the belief of a future state, or rather endeavoured to persuade themselves that there is none; and they will generally be found to be such, whose characters procure little credit to their opinions, and who give no reason to suspect a very rigid impartiality in their reasonings concerning them. It will not be an invidious reflection to say, that not one of them can have any sentiments or real sense of religion, and that far the greatest part of them are men of liberty and pleasure, to whom the belief of a future state is not very pleasing or favourable, who are too much under the power of inclination to weigh in an equal ballance reasons that would lead them into a persuasion of the truth of undesirable principles; the belief of which would either make them uneasy in their methods of life, or force them to forsake those practices, from which they do not so much as wish to be reformed. Now when men of this cast and character ridicule, or indulge to scepticism about a future state,
or

or take upon them to deny it, and the great events that are to take place in it; respectively according to the difference of men's actions; their very characters discredit their sentiments, and shew they are the result, not of maturer judgment, but of an irrational bias, and a real prejudice against truth and righteousness; or, in a word, unbelievers through conveniency and choice. On the contrary, the higher men's sentiments are of God, the more firm their belief of his providence, the more seriously they worship him, and the greater friends they are to the practice of universal righteousness and virtue, the more disposed they are to the belief of a future state, and the more certain and pleasing their expectations of happiness in it. 'Tis one of the first principles with them, that God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him, and they cannot help connecting piety and virtue with the hope of a recompence from him. Now whence is this connection? Doth it not arise from the nature of God, and the most certain nature of things? Is it not therefore a connection made by God himself, as he hath so formed us, as that we cannot help seeing and rejoicing in it.

The conclusions of infidelity and vice are often seen in the most convincing manner to be groundless and false, when the charm of pleasure is broken, and the amusements and deceits of folly forsake them, and the intervals of sober and calm reflection come in
the

the room of them. But so far is the belief of a future state, and a blessed immortality from deserting or appearing false or precarious to sincerely religious and virtuous men, that in these very seasons and intervals, when infidelity sneaks away from the heart, scourged out of it by the furies of remorse and terror, and the vices that occasioned it become the abhorrence of those who practised them; this belief frequently rises into the fullest assurance, and their prospect of a blessed recompence from God becomes more certain and delightful. Tell me then ye sons of vice, whence comes this mighty change in your convictions and principles frequently at the close of life? Or whence is it, that you become as thorough believers, in spite of yourselves, as those you have ridiculed for superstition and credulity; and believers too, without dignity, unwillingly, and utterly devoid of comfort? Why do ye not always die as firm unbelievers as you have lived, and make the bold trial of eternity with an undaunted courage, and an intrepid contempt of every thing that may happen in it? Alas! for them, conscience recoils, reason forbids it, contrary probability stares them in the face, and even full conviction of its folly and madness is the dreadful cure of all their unbelief. But whoever saw or heard of an habitually religious and good man turn unbeliever, when he came to die? Did such a one ever repent of his piety to God, the virtues he hath practised, or the good works
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he hath been enabled to abound in? Did he ever grow pale at the consciousness of having been just and chaste and temperate, benevolent and kind and merciful? Or start back at the thoughts of death, at the remembrance of having maintained *a conscience void of offence towards God and man*? Or renounce his hopes as vain and criminal, or die convinced that he lived a fool, by living under the influence of faith and reason? Whence is it, that no one instance of this should ever happen? It cannot be from any real rational convictions, that there is any truth in the principles of religion, or the doctrine of a world of future recompence; if, as unbelievers and libertines would endeavour to persuade us, all these notions are founded only in imagination, childish prepossessions, mistaken education, and the glooms of melancholy and enthusiasm. If this be the case, it may be as reasonably expected, that believers should at least sometimes turn infidels, religious men deride their own practice as ridiculous and superstitious, and virtuous men laugh at the distinction between good and evil, in the close of life, and when they are going out of being, as they imagine, into non-existence; as that scepticks should turn believers *, profligates should curse their former follies, and hardened sinners relent, profess their repentance, and promise amendment, if they recover from the danger that

* Sed. Vid. Plutar. vit. Bruti et Flor. l. 4. c. 7. circa finem. Plutar. de Superstit. p. 165. a Dion. Cass. p. 47. § 49. fin. 36.

threatens

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threatens them. This latter case frequently happens ; the former never ; and the reason is evident, because infidelity is generally the hasty unripened conclusion of self-prejudice, of corrupt inclination, and the habitual love of vice ; made in a sort necessary for vindicating themselves to their own consciences, or to stifle and extinguish the painful reproaches and remonstrances of them. And therefore the prospect of death, which ihews them clearly to themselves, introduces reason in the room of passion, awakens conscience to give its impartial testimony, and makes men weigh things, not in the deceitful ballance of inclination, but of sober, cool and deliberate judgment ; which strips vice of its delusive and ensnaring dress, and represents it in all its native and genuine deformity, and makes them, in spite of their own wishes, apprehensive that there is a something to come, for which they know they are but ill prepared, after they go down to the grave ; I say the prospect of death, when the enchantments of pleasure are now no more, and the delusions of sin can no longer impose on them, forces them to renounce their former scepticism, to confess the truth of the principles they once derided, and turn cowardly penitents, through the dreadful, but just fears of a future damnation. Whereas virtuous and good men, who embraced the principles of religion and morality through rational conviction, without suffering inclination and the love of vice, to bribe them against truth and righteousness,

righteousness, and who through the influence of their principles have *lived soberly, righteously and godly in the present world*, can never change their principles in the last period of life, from any conviction that they have embraced them upon any dishonourable and sensual motives, nor ever repent for a single moment, that they have purified their hearts, and preserved themselves free from the corruptions of the world, by their obedience to the truth, but die as they have lived firm believers, and rejoice that as they have *sought after glory, honour, and immortality, they shall obtain eternal life.*

The words we render *glory and honour* are joined together by the best writers, and though there is a great similitude of meaning in them, yet it is very far from being exactly the same*. The first denotes the good esteem and reputation that any man hath with others, upon account of any real or supposed excellencies he is possessed of, or any peculiar privileges or distinguishing favours conferred on him, the original word frequently denoting opinion, and from thence by an easy figure that reputation, respect and praise, which follows, from the good opinion of others. Thus it is said of some of the *chief rulers* of the Jews, *that they believed in Christ, but because of the Pharisees did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the Synagogue; because they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God* †. i. e. good esteem and applause of men more than the com-

* *δοξα.*

† John xii. 43.

commendation of God. The other word *, we render honour, properly denotes those marks of favour, that are bestowed by others, especially by a superior, either as the reward of another's merit, or to testify a peculiar regard and affection to him, and thereby to elevate him above the common rank, and place him in circumstances of distinguished dignity. Thus, *a prophet hath no honour in his own country* †. They will not give him the sacred title, nor the esteem and reverence that is due to it; and our Lord tells his Apostles: *If any man serve me, him will my father honour* ‡; advance him to a state of the highest dignity, and distinguish him by the peculiar favours bestowed on him. So that the great employment and comprehensive service of a Christian, as such, is to pursue the highest reputation, and the most durable and substantial honour.

1. He is to seek after *glory*, and peculiarly *that glory which comes from God*; that praise and commendation which he bestows on all those who approve themselves to him, by always doing the things that please him. There is a kind of natural instinct in men, that powerfully leads them to wish the good opinion, and desire to be esteemed and well spoken of by others. Even virtuous minds cannot divest themselves of the love of praise, and no man can help feeling a very sensible pleasure from the cordial commendation of

* τιμη

† John iv. 44.

‡ xii. 26.

those

those he loves and honours, and every wise and good man will endeavour by a right behaviour, first to deserve, and then secure it ; and he who cares not what the world says of him, hath put off decency, and forfeited the common civilities of mankind. This good opinion of others will be proportionably more valuable, according to their superior characters and ranks, their distinguishing titles, their stations of honour, and especially their moral qualifications and endowments, sanctity of behaviour, shining abilities, and amiable dispositions and affections. And therefore the commendation and praise that comes from God is of all others the most desirable, as it is not the effect of partiality and prejudice, hath nothing of affectation and flattery in it, nor is given upon a mistaken opinion of the character of those who are the objects of it ; but is founded in truth, upon the possession of some real excellency, somewhat that is truly praiseworthy, and estimable in the infallible opinion and judgment that he forms of persons and things ; and whose praise therefore is not like the fickle, unmeaning applauses and mistaken commendations of ignorant or deceitful men, that often mean nothing, and are no proof of any real excellency, or commendable quality in the persons on whom they are bestowed, but is given by him as his testimony to real worth, and renders the persons who receive it worthy the affection, esteem, friendship and honour of the whole reasonable creation. This, Sirs, is a

*blessing worth your pursuing. You can live for nothing greater or better. Secure this, and you have all that heaven and earth can bestow. The praise of God is of infinitely more value than all the treasures of the universe, and will add a greater sanctity, lustre, and dignity to their characters, than should angels and men, and the whole creation join in the applauses they give you ; for not he who commendeth himself, or is commended by others is approved, but he who the Lord commendeth *. The characters of these are expressly declared in Scripture, and if we can observe them in ourselves, with what pleasure, with what thankfulness to the grace and mercy of God, should we reflect on our happy condition, in that amidst all the imperfections that accompany us, yet we are in our prevailing temper and character of the number of those excellent ones of the earth, in whom he delights, whom his countenance beholds with pleasure, whom he hath set apart for himself, whom he approves by the voice of revelation, and who shall finally receive his commendation, in the most authentick, publick and honourable manner. For there is a day approaching, when God by Jesus Christ, will solemnly, and in the view of the whole rational creation, pronounce every sincere and faithful Christian, acquitted from every charge against him, publicly declare him a good and faithful servant, and command him to enter into his master's joy. Thus*

* 2 Cor. x. 18.

shall

shall it be done to those, whom God delights to honour. Who would not wish to be of that distinguished number ! Who would not be glad thus to have his fidelity acknowledged ! What musick will that *well done* of the Son of God, be in thine ears, Christian, if thou shalt hear it spoken to thyself ! Sweeter than the melody that the most exquisite strains of earthly skill can form, or the harmony of the heavenly choir of angels themselves can possibly entertain thee with. Oh ! seek after this glory, and God by Christ will hereafter bestow it on thee. And this is the more valuable, as,

2. This commendation of God hath *the highest privileges and honours attending it*. Mere commendation hath little substantial in it, and praise that hath nothing valuable attending it, is but an insignificant breath, that ministers but little to the true enjoyment and dignity of life. It is but thin food, and though it may give a momentary pleasure, soon leaves us empty and unsatisfied. The *praise that comes from God* is not only *highly honourable* in its nature, but its *consequences* the most truly *glorious*, and worthy to awaken and animate the warmest ambition of our minds. There is nothing esteemed amongst the sons of men more than conquest and victory. Those whom God approves shall obtain the most difficult and glorious *victory* of all others. They not only conquer themselves, their criminal passions and affections, and the corruptions and temptations of the sinful world in which they

dwell, and of the powers of darkness, who have in every age subdued and enslaved so great a part of mankind to their usurped and lawless dominions ; but what is more, they shall *triumph over death and the grave*, from which the heathen world imagined there was no possible redemption, and the conquest of which nothing can secure us, but the power and grace of God in the gospel of Christ Jesus. To trample this enemy under our feet will be a victory indeed, in which we may justly boast. This will render us in the literal sense *more than conquerors*, infinitely superior to all the boasted heroes of the earth, who after they have won battles, and subdued kingdoms, and obtained the most splendid triumphs, have yielded up their laurels, and become captives to the irresistible power of the common enemy and destroyer of mankind. In consequence of this victory over death, how rich will be the *crown* that shall incircle them, the *crown of glory, life, and righteousness*, and how bright the robes of victory, with which God shall cloath them ; when *this mortal shall put on immortality, this corruptible shall put on incorruption, when we shall be equal to angels* in our external appearance, by being formed into the most perfect *resemblance of the Son of God* himself, and thus fitted to enter into the mansions of supream blessedness and glory. For this is a farther circumstance of honour, that we should keep in constant view, and diligently endeavour to pursue ; *an admission* into that blessed world, which

which is the *peculiar habitation of God himself*, where the Saviour of mankind *sits, enthroned at the right hand of God his Father*, where all the flower of the creation, angels and arch-angels, thrones and dominions, principalities and powers, have their everlasting dwelling, and enjoy eternal felicity, in the presence and full enjoyment of him, who is the true fountain of honour, and whose favour is the source of uninterrupted and incorruptible blessedness. To be admitted as associates with them in their celestial enjoyments and services, how inestimable the privilege, how high the honour! 'Tis to this, Christians, you are to aspire. 'Tis this you are to make the object of your perpetual pursuit; and could any description of mine help to awaken and fix your ambition to secure this heavenly glory and honour, how happy will be your condition, and with what joy unspeakable shall we meet together in the day of Christ! And what compleats the whole, is

3. That the great object of our pursuit is *immortality*, as well as *glory and honour*, i. e. this glory and honour that we are to aim at is *incorruptible and immortal*. The original word denotes incorruptibility, or what will never corrupt and decay; is not liable to fade and perish. For this is the invaluable discovery, that hath been made us by the doctrine and mediation of Christ, *who hath brought life and immortality*, i. e. *immortal life to light by his gospel*, and assured all his faithful disciples,

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by the most express promises from God his Father, that it shall be finally conferred upon them. *My sheep*, says he, *hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. My Father who gave them me is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand* *.

This is the mortifying circumstance which lowers the value of all earthly good things, that they are frail, uncertain and perishing. What is *life* itself? How comparatively short in its longest duration? How soon liable to be cut off? How certainly will the hour come, that puts an everlasting period to it? How little are *health* and *strength* to be depended on? How soon weakened by distemper, or impaired and wasted by increase of years? How frail a flower is *beauty*? Of little more stability than the painted bubble that dies away almost as soon as it rises, that wanes by a sickly blast, or envious beam, that often changes into deformity by a cruel disease, the bloom of which is every day, though imperceptibly for some time, wearing off, and that frequently entirely departs, without leaving any traces, by which the remembrance of it may be preserved. Our *riches*, how often do they treacherously desert their envied possessors! *Moth and rust corrupt them, and thieves break through and plunder them. Fame and*

* John x. 27, 29.

glory, how thin and empty is the foundation that supports them, fickle as opinion, various as fancy, capricious as humour, unsubstantial as a vapour, that droops at the breath of calumny, that dies away with change of fortune, that a single imprudence often blasts, and that is much oftener utterly destroyed by the malignity and treacherous practices of restless envy, impatient disappointment, and implacable malice. Even earthly *majesty* itself hath the same marks of instability and corruption engraven on it, that all other worldly perfection hath, the crown will sooner or later drop from the wearer's head, the scepter fall from his hand, his titles be transferred to another, and all the pomp of human grandeur be levelled with the grave. So true is that divine admonition of the inspired writer : *All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and the flower thereof fadeth away ** ; but, O glorious consolation ! *the word of the Lord endureth forever* ; the *promises* of God by Christ are *yea and amen* ; absolute in their grant, and infallibly certain in their performance. The great promise of the gospel is *eternal life*, and that life endowed with incorruptible glory and honour. The approbation that God will bestow, will be a *permanent blessing*, and *immutable* as his love of righteousness and truth, that can never decay in the importance and worth of it, will cloath

* 1 Pet. i. 24, 25.

us with a dignity that can never cease, that will render us unchangeably respectable amongst all the orders of the heavenly hierarchy, and the infinitely valuable effects of which will be lasting as eternity. For

The honours conferred in consequence of this final praise that comes from God, are not only the most valuable, but *permanent* in their nature. The splendor of our celestial bodies, when once invested therewith, shall be *incorruptible and immortal*; *our dwelling eternal in the heavens*; our access to God ever free and open; our conformity to him perfect and immutable; his noblest image upon our nature fixed and indelible, and the lustre of that *crown of righteousness and life, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give to such as love him*, at the second appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ, such as *shall never fade away*.

'Tis a very pleasing account St. Paul hath given us of this important truth, in that passage, where comparing the Christian life to a race, he says, *Know ye not that they who run in a race, run all, but that one only receiveth the prize* *; viz. he who outstrips the other, and comes first to the goal that is before him. *So run you*, adds he, *that you may obtain*. *Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible one*; so we run, not as *uncertainly*, whether we shall ever get the prize, but sure of receiving it, if we run *lawfully*, i. e. with patience and perseverance;

* 1 Cor. ix. 24, 25.

for how many soever there are who run this race, *none* of their labour *shall be in vain in the Lord*, but the crown of life and glory be distributed equally to them all. Such is the infinite liberality, and the diffusive bounty of God, the great Institutor and Lord of the Christian race, that he holds out to every one of us the incorruptible crown, bids us seize on the glorious prize, bear it off in triumph, and wear it as our own forever. Well may the Christian stand astonished at this amazing offer and promise of the grace of God, and cry out in the surprize of his soul: *Immortal life and glory for me!* For me, who am but of *yesterday*, and taken out of the dust! For me, who am a *sinful* creature, and have forfeited the present life, and all the happiness of it? Shall I awake out of the dust, triumph over death, rise in my Saviour's image, and share in all the joys and glories of eternity! Yes, this is the assurance of him, who can bestow this blessedness, and whose goodness is infinite and will finally vouchsafe it. *O the riches of the grace of God!* How undeserved, how free, how large and permanent the effects of it!

But it must be *won* before it can be *worn*. *Glory, honour, and immortality* are too valuable blessings to be bestowed, where men throw contempt on the offer of them, value other things in preference to them, and will not use the proper methods to obtain them. They will never be had without *diligently seeking them*. We must *seek after glory and honour,*
and

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and immortality, by constancy in good works, if
we would finally inherit eternal life. And
surely,

The *importance* and *worth* of them deserve to be the frequent subject of our most *serious consideration*. It is one great excellency of the Christian doctrine, that it raises the minds of men above all sensible and terrestrial objects, elevates them to the contemplation of future invisible realities, transports them into eternity itself, and makes them, even in the present life, in some of the most pleasing hours and seasons of it, the inhabitants of the celestial world, conversant with superior spirits, and shares with them in their highest services and enjoyments; yea even causes them to approach the eternal God, and presents to their view the glorified Redeemer in all the majesty of the Son of God, and all the grace of the Redeemer of mankind, and their benevolent Intercessor and Advocate at his Father's right hand. In these things we are nearly interested, and as 'tis an instance of high impiety not to have God in all our thoughts, so it is of the most criminal negligence and folly never to think of that future world, for which we are evidently made, nor of that better life, and more glorious condition, into which the future state will introduce all who believe and obey the gospel. Every one sees it impossible to seek after what never engages our thoughts, and what therefore never can be the object of our view. If immortal blessedness be indeed the great end
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we aim at, it will certainly employ some of our most serious moments, and we shall never suffer, either the interests of the present life, or the love of pleasure, perpetually to exclude all that concern about it, which its infinite importance deserves, as though we did not at all believe the reality of it, or esteemed it of less value, than the transitory enjoyments of the present life. Indeed if we would weigh things impartially in the balance of reason and truth, the incorruptible glory and blessedness of the heavenly world, as described and promised by the gospel revelation, is of that infinite superior worth in itself, and consequence to us, as that every thing that can be named of temporal prosperity and glory will appear to be as nothing, yea less than nothing and vanity. Strange, that every trifle should have a share in our thoughts, and immortal life and happiness so seldom be admitted into them, and make no more lasting and pleasing impression upon us ! Hardly can he be said to *seek after glory, honour, and immortality*, who is wholly engrossed by other views, and hath no inclination or heart to consider the mighty sum of happiness they include, and by what means they may be most effectually secured.

If we in good earnest set ourselves to pursue this immortal glory and blessedness, it will be the object of *our high esteem*, we shall value it in proportion to its worth, and *set our affections on it*, as the one great comprehensive blessing of our being. It will excite
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our warmest desires of obtaining it, and fill us with the strongest ambition of being finally accounted worthy to receive it. This is the advice of the Apostle. *If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth* *. And when he writes to the Corinthians to comfort them under their sufferings for Christ, and to direct them from whence they must derive the supports they wanted, he informed them, it must be by *habitually looking, not at the things which are seen, which are temporal, but at those which are not seen, which are eternal* †. And indeed the more conversant we are with the promises of the gospel, the more we enter by faith and meditation into the nature and circumstances of the happiness and glory that shall hereafter be revealed, the more will it appear to deserve our preference, above every thing else that can come in competition with it, the more ardent will be the desires of our hearts after it, and the stronger our ambition finally to secure it. If thou hast a generous mind, I know that the commendation and praise of the impartial and good, when attended with the inward consciousness of having done well, and deserved their esteem and friendship, must give thee a pleasure, the most grateful in its nature, and that will greatly heighten the relish and enjoyment of life. But now re-

* Colof. iii. 1, 2. † 2 Cor. iv. 18.

flect but for a moment ; if thou art a lover of praise, and that thou mayest be without vanity or guilt, the praise that comes from the greatest and best, and that hath the most solid advantages connected with it, must be the most desirable. Could'st thou obtain the commendation of God, should he by an audible voice distinguish thee, and declare thee to the rest of the world ; this is the man that I approve and honour, and own as my friend and favourite ; with what dignity of character would it cloath thee ! What respect would it conciliate from the world ! How truly venerable and sacred would it render thee ! Why, this is the very honour that awaits thee as a Christian. Before a grander assembly than the whole earth can form, thou shalt be pronounced by the mouth of the Son of God, before angels and men, *a good and faithful servant*, be distinguished as such by the rewards of heavenly life and glory, and be put into the full possession of an *incorruptible and unfading inheritance*. Oh what joy will transport the heart at this awful transaction ! How will the sons of light congratulate thee, on the testimony of God himself to thy integrity and fidelity ! How will thy fellow saints rejoice with thee, in thus mutually sharing the commendation of your God and Father ! With what satisfaction will the benevolent Saviour conclude the solemnity of the universal judgment, when from his high tribunal he shall thus determine your everlasting state :
Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared

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prepared for you from the foundation of the world.
Here is the hope, this the ambition of the
saints of God, that should continually pos-
sess and influence them. If our affections are
thus engaged, I shall only add :

That the final obtaining this immortal
glory and honour will be regarded by us, as
the *great end of life*, and all our actions will
be made subservient to this, as the first and
highest interest of our beings. The seeking
after this immortal blessedness doth indeed by
no means imply that we are never to think of
any thing else but this, or that we are to
grow negligent of and indifferent to all the
interests of the present life, and have no
respect to things visible and temporary, the
more effectually to secure things invisible and
eternal. Superstition may teach this, but true
religion never can, and the gospel of Christ
no where doth. A recluse may possibly be a
good man, but then his goodness will be as
unprofitable to men, as it is to God, and
therefore be in proportion of less value and
consequence to himself, because his very
faith wants one thing essential to recommend
it, as it doth not, and cannot *work by love*,
and his piety, if he hath any, doth not so
shine before men, as to excite them to *glorify*
our Father who is in heaven. Such is the good-
ness of God, that he allows us to be wise for
ourselves in time as well as eternity, and we
may be seeking after immortal glory and bles-
sedness, even whilst we are properly in quest
of the comforts and conveniences of the pre-
sent

sent state. He who is travelling may be very diligently pursuing his journey, even when he doth not actually think where he is going, but is taken up with the objects of the road through which he passeth; and may have one principal design he is habitually carrying on, though many intermediate affairs may happen, which require some degree of attention and care. A wise and prudent man will always prefer his true interest to all others, and a sincere Christian, whatever are his engagements in the present state, will never forget those which relate to a better. He will in general never pursue the advantages of time by such measures, as will incur the forfeiture of the blessings of eternity; and if these two interests should at any time interfere, he will drop the lesser, and pursue that which is the most worthy his regard, and will best reward it. He fixes this as the governing principle of his conduct, that as God hath graciously offered immortal glory and blessedness, he will at all hazards secure the possession of it, and loose every thing rather than be deprived of it. And therefore he will *transact all the affairs* he is concerned in here, so *regulate his pleasures*, as to the nature of them, and the manner of indulging them, and so comply with the customs and practices of the world he lives in, as *not to prejudice* his hopes of, and title to the nobler services and enjoyments of an *happier and better world*. And being firmly persuaded, that *he who walketh uprightly walketh surely*, and that
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the path of true religion and virtue, is the only path that leads to life and happiness, he is determined ever to pursue his noblest hopes *by a patient continuance in well doing ; knowing from the reason of things, and the constitution of God by Christ, that if he gives all diligence to add to his faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge temperance, to temperance patience, to patience godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity ; he shall contract the best meetness for that incorruptible happiness he cherishes the hopes of, and at last have an entrance administered to him abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.* But this immediately leads me to the second general, of which in the next discourse.



SERMON

S E R M O N XVII.

A Patient Continuance in well doing
explained.

ROMANS ii. 7.

*To them, who by patient continuance in well doing
seek for Glory, and Honour, and Immortality,
eternal Life.*

OH how happy is it for men, that they are sure to obtain eternal life by seeking it ! How tempting is the object that invites our pursuit ! How pleasing and honourable the means to be employed in order to our obtaining this invaluable blessing ! How worthy of God to ordain ! How suitable to our nature and condition diligently to improve ! It must be sought after, and will certainly be secured by a patient continuance in well doing. I shall therefore now proceed

To consider the second general head of discourse from these words ; or how this invaluable prize of glory, honour, and immortality is to be pursued and finally secured ; viz. *We shall seek it by a patient continuance in well doing* ; or as the words would have been

better, and more nearly to the original rendered ; *the persevering practice of every good work* ; or as others think ; through the patience or perseverance of the good work. Agreeably to this version, they explain this *good work of faith*, which our blessed Lord calls the *work of God*, and which is sometimes called the *work of the Lord*, and *the work of Christ*. And thus the sense will be ; that to them, who by patience and perseverance in the faith of Christ, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, God will give eternal life. And this contains a very just and important truth ; for patience and perseverance in the faith of Christ, implies *fidelity* and *constancy* in our Christian profession, by *stedfastly adhering to the truths* of his gospel, and under the influence of our Christian principles, *habitually practising all the virtues and important duties*, that are peculiar and essential to the Christian life. But though there be no objection against this doctrine, yet it doth not appear to be the real sense of the place ; for there is no instance in which *faith* is stiled thus descriptively *the good work*, and when we read of *the work of faith*, it doth not mean faith, as wrought in us by the power of God, but those *good effects, which faith works or produces*, wherever it is genuine and influential. Thus St. Paul tells the Thessalonians, *that he remembered without ceasing their work of faith and labour of love* * ; i. e. that good effect which

* 1 Thes. i. 3.

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their faith produced, and that diligence in doing good to which their affection excited them ; or as the Apostle expresses it to the Galatians : *Faith which worketh by love* *.

And that by perseverance of the good work in my text, he means, as our translators have, with great propriety rendered it, *patient continuance*, or steady perseverance *in well doing*, is evident by his *opposing* it to *disobedience to the truth*, and *obeying unrighteousness*, and *working evil* ; and assuring us, *that God will render glory, honour, and peace to every man that worketh good* †. So that the doctrine of my text is this : That the approbation of God, and the honours of the heavenly state, and the everlasting continuance of both, are to be pursued and finally secured by *an habitual course of good works*, or by a steady perseverance, throughout the whole of life in all Christian piety and virtue. Let it be observed here

I. That the *good works* here spoken of, include the *whole of our Christian practice and duty*, and comprehend in them all the instances of piety to God, all the obligations of justice, equity, and goodness to others, the regulation and government of all our passions and affections, discovered by a perpetual temperance, sobriety and moderation in the management of ourselves ; *whatever things are true, venerable, just, pure, lovely, reputable, virtuous, and praise worthy*. *These are the things, which as Christians, we are to think of,*

* Galat. v. 6. † Rom. ii, 8, 9, 10.

approve and do, if we would have the blessing and presence of the God of peace with us.

The gospel of Christ is not only a system of *doctrines*, but of *good morals* too ; it not only contains a charter of privileges, but a code of laws, and a directory of duty ; not only sets before us *exceeding great and precious promises*, but the *commands* of God, and the precepts of *universal righteousness* ; never recommends *faith* to the exclusion of *good works*, but as the very *root* that produces, cherishes, and perpetuates them. And to shew of what importance they are in Christianity, the Christian blessedness is frequently represented in the sacred writings, under the notion of a *recompence* and reward, which necessarily supposes somewhat *done by us*, as the object of the reward ; *viz.* our fidelity to God and Christ, by a persevering belief of and obedience to the gospel. Hence our life and duty as Christians is compared to a race, and we are exhorted *to run, so as that we may obtain* ; because as in this ancient exercise or game, perseverance in running was necessary to obtain the prize, so it is with respect to the Christian life ; we must *continue*, with an unabating vigour and resolution, in that way of religion and virtue, duty and obedience to God, which the gospel chalks out to us, if we would finally *lay hold of eternal life*, which is the inestimable *prize of our high calling of God in Christ*. This is what the Apostle calls *our meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light*,
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our direct and immediate preparation for and title to the Christian reward. This is the doctrine of our blessed Lord, and his Apostles. *He that beareth, i. e. obeys my word, and believes on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation* * ; in which words he puts faith and practice on the same foundation, and makes them equally necessary to salvation. And he tells his disciples : *Hereby is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruits ; so shall ye be my disciples* †. And St. Paul in the close of his discourse concerning the resurrection, exhorts us : *Be ye stedfast, immoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord* ‡. And after St. Peter had been exhorting the people he wrote to, to behave worthy the precious promises of the gospel, by uniting all the most excellent virtues in their character ; he adds this consideration as the great encouragement and motive to it : *If ye do these things ye shall never fall ; for so an entrance shall be ministered to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. But that unless these things be in us and abound, we shall be barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ* §, and that if we are defective in them, *we are blind, and cannot see afar off, i. e. like short sighted persons, cannot see the most important objects clearly, and distinctly, and have*

* John v. 24. † xv. 8. ‡ 1 Cor. xv. 58. § 2 Pet. i. 10, 11

forgotten that they were purged from their old sins, or that the great design of the promises given them, was to enable them to escape the corruptions of the world, and renounce their former sins, and recover them to the practice of the most amiable virtues.

Yea, of such importance are good works in the Christian scheme, as that in the future judgment our everlasting state will be determined and fixed for immortal life and happiness, if we shall be found to have diligently practised and abounded in them. Will you believe Jesus Christ on this article, who is to be your judge and mine at the last great day? He says in general, *that the Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels, and then he shall reward every man according to his works* *. But he says more than this; *that they who are in their graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation* †. Agreeable to this is the doctrine of St. Paul immediately after my text. *To them that are contentious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, God will render indignation and wrath; tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil; but glory, honour, and peace to every man that worketh good; for there is no respect of persons with God.* And indeed this is the doctrine that runs through the whole New Testament, that the great things

* Matt. xvi. 27.

† John v. 29.

that will be cognizable at the tribunal of Christ will be the actions of all men, and that they will be acquitted or condemned, rewarded or punished, as their *actions*, i. e. their prevailing behaviour through life, shall be found upon trial to have *been good or evil*. In our Saviour's words, *the wicked and uncharitable shall go into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal*.

And indeed this is placing the glory, honour, and immortality of the future state, upon its rational and solid foundation. For men are, what their actions and habitual conduct denominate them to be, and if they are judged at all, it must be by their moral character, and can be by nothing else; and if they are judged by this, if their moral character be found evil, they must fall under condemnation; for God cannot approve sin, nor justify the doers of it; and if their actions shall appear to have been in a prevailing manner influenced by Christian principles and motives, and agreeable to the main essential precepts of Christianity, they will thus far be approved, and the persons who do them be accepted *as good and faithful servants*; and the sins and errors from which they have been recovered by repentance will obtain *remission, through the redemption that is in and by our Lord Jesus Christ*.

To render indeed any of the actions of our lives in a moral sense good, estimable in their nature, and commendable by a wise and righteous God, they must be dictated by,

and proceed from proper *principles of truth*, and the dispositions of a *good and worthy heart*. The very same actions in one man may have great moral dignity and worth in them, that in another person may have little or nothing to recommend them, and which though they may intitle them to great esteem and affection from others, who cannot know the motives from which they flow, and the real temper of heart that influences them, may be found extremely defective, and altogether, or almost utterly destitute of every circumstance of real worth, when *weighed in the balance of the sanctuary*, and viewed by his eye, which penetrates into the inmost recesses of the hearts of men. *Education* and the general customs of the nations we live in may reconcile and habituate men to the external forms and ritual observations of religion. Mere *good nature*, and a disposition originally friendly may prompt some to the most kind and generous behaviour. A sense of decency, a regard to *reputation*, and the love of the praise of men, may be the views by which others act in the good works which they perform; whilst some, and those the most detestible of all others, appear serious, devote, and extremely godly, the better *to promote their worldly interest*, to insinuate themselves into the favour of those, whom they have an interest to deceive, and whom they intend to make the prey of their own necessities, extravagances or avarice. In these circumstances, actions good, as to the matter and appearance
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of them, may be extremely bad as to their moral nature and qualities, and all their best works may in this view be justly called *splendida peccata*, *splendid crimes*, incrustated with the paint, and decorated with the glossy colours of piety and virtue, though absolutely void of the reality and truth of them : But the good works in which sincere Christians persevere, and seek for glory, honour, and immortal life, are as much superior to these, as the substance to the shadow, as real beauty is to that which is fictitious, and as the sterling gold to the baser metal which imitates and resembles it. They proceed from *principles* of the most certain and important truth ; *faith in God*, as the rewarder of them that seek him ; *faith in Christ*, as the great Instructor, Pattern, Saviour, and Judge of all men ; and *faith in the future invisible world*, and *the recompence of reward*, finally to be distributed to all that believe and obey the gospel. They are the result of the *best* and most excellent *dispositions* of mind, a due reverence for God's authority, the desire to approve ourselves to him, and the governing ambition of securing his favour, from the love of Christ, and a prevailing gratitude to him for all the benefits of redemption, from a warm desire of resembling him in the perfection of his character, and all the amiable virtues of his example ; of being owned by him hereafter as his genuine disciples, being publickly acquitted by him before his awful tribunal, and *admitted* to enter *into his joy*, and dwell for ever in his kingdom

kingdom and presence, from a real and cordial spirit of benevolence and humanity, the inward approbation and love of justice and righteousness, and that habitual integrity and candour of heart, which prompts to all social duties, renders persons always desirous, and even sometimes anxious to do that which is right, and which is a perpetual excitement in all things to act, as our profession, characters, relations, and engagements in life require. And will any person venture to call such actions as these *splendid sins*? Thus to debase the essential duties of the Christian life, to reproach them as worthless, and of no efficacy and influence, of no consideration and value in the last great day, when they are declared to be *profitable to men, and acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*? The real foundation upon which our final acquittance in judgment, and our admission into eternal life, is expressly made by Christ himself to depend?

'Tis true, that the very *best works* of the best of men are very far from rising up to the full standard of *perfection*, and that was the *reward* of Christian piety and virtue to be absolutely *limited* by the *measure* of any human goodness, our hopes would sink to a very *low* degree, and the future happiness arising from this plea would be extremely imperfect and short lived. But then it should be remembered, that *imperfection* in goodness is the very condition and one of the most *essential characteristics* of the present state of mankind,

mankind, since there is *not one that liveth and sinneth not*. If this was not the case, where would be the necessity or use of the scheme of redemption by the sufferings and death, the intercession and advocacy of Christ; which suppose men not to be free from sin and blame, but is founded on the reality of all men's being sinners, and their consequent need of the salvation of God by Christ. But then there is nothing more easily reconcileable, than that *glory, honour, and immortality*, may in one view be considered and promised under the notion of the *reward of a patient continuance in well doing*; and in another as the effect of *the riches of God's grace through the redemption obtained for us by Jesus Christ*. For though a reward always implies service done, it by no means implies, that the service is equal to the reward, and gives a claim in strict equity and justice to the recompence promised and conferred. He who only doth, what his duty obliges him to do, may expect protection, but cannot deserve peculiar favours; much less if he be deficient in his duty, or in any considerable instances hath acted contrary to it; and though there may be a propriety, arising from the character of a superior, and the ends of government, in conferring benefits on one who hath no strict claim in justice to receive them, and a real meetness and disposition in him to receive such benefits, arising from an ingenuous acknowledgment of his faults, a desire to amend, and a future care to approve himself faithful

faithful in his station ; yea, though a superior may encourage offenders to return to their duty, and behave suitable to their obligations, by the promise of some peculiar and distinguishing recompence : Yet every one sees, that in all these cases the benefits vouchsafed are the real effects of goodness, and the recompence of grace, and not of proper debt and merit. The propriety of bestowing it, and the meetness of the person to receive it, *demonstrate the wisdom* of the giver, but doth *not lessen the freedom and grace* of the gift, nor create the least merit in him that receives it. The favour might have been withheld without any impeachment of justice, and had the recompence never been promised, no injury would have been done to him, who had no original right to demand it.

All men are the servants of God by nature, and born under immutable obligations to yield him the most intire and chearful obedience of soul and body to all his commands ; and had they never deviated from their allegiance and duty, they might certainly have expected from the equity of their wise and good creator, his protection, and all those marks of favour, that were suitable to their nature, and necessary to their happiness, whilst he was pleased to continue them in being. And this is the utmost they could have claimed either in equity or justice. Whether God would perpetuate their beings, or not, depended on the resolutions of his own wisdom and goodness ; for his giving them being was
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no reason in itself, why he should render them immortal, and though that might be no forfeiture of being by sin, yet as there could be no natural obligation upon God to perpetuate it, there could be no injury done them in his resuming it; for supposing their obedience ever so perfect, it would be no more than what they owed him in strictness of duty, and there can be no proportion between the services of men, which are repaid by the blessings of life every day, and the gift of everlasting life and blessedness; which though it be consistent with the goodness of an infinitely benevolent being to bestow, it is infinitely beyond the worth of any created goodness to deserve. But how infinitely more absurd is the plea of right to glory, honour, and immortality from any of the children of men, in their present *imperfect* and *sinful* condition. Who of us can pretend to *innocence*, or if recovered from a sinful course, to an after *sinless* and *perfect* obedience? It would be affronting their own good sense and experience, should I attempt by any arguments to convince you, that you are offenders against God, and a compliment which you yourselves would think founded in the most criminal and palpable flattery, should I address you, and encourage you to hope for eternal life, as persons who had never forfeited the favour of God, and in no one instance incurred his displeasure. To you therefore and me, *merit* in us, with respect to God, and the gift of everlasting happiness, must be deemed as
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nothing better than the dictates of ignorance, the excrecence of folly, and the offspring of the most criminal presumption. It is true, that God hath been pleased to encourage our repentance, our return to our duty, and our perseverance in well doing, by the promise of forgiveness, the restoration to his favour, and the recompence of everlasting life and blessedness. But is not this an encouragement of *mercy*, a recompence of undeserved grace and favour, that discovers our unworthiness, at the same time, that it proclaims and illustrates the riches of the grace of God. So that though the terms on which the blessing is bestowed is an habitual practice of all good works, yet still the blessing is by us unmerited, and can be claimed only by virtue of the constitution of the gospel grace, and the voluntary promises of God by Jesus Christ.

In these good works we *must patiently continue, never be weary of well doing*, nor yield to the influence of any temptations to prevent our progress, and turn us aside from the path of our duty. In the first ages of Christianity, the difficulty of perseverance in the faith of Christ and obedience to his gospel, was exceeding great, and the severest terrors of persecution threatened and endangered the resolution and constancy of the Saints of God. But they stood their ground, and triumphed in their victory over all their enemies. Strengthened by their principles, and animated by the prize of heavenly life and glory, that they kept

kept continually in view, and laying aside every weight and incumbrance of sensual affections, and criminal passions, and every sin that easily beset them, they ran with patience the arduous race that was set before them, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of their faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, and despised the shame, and is sat down at the right hand of God, and having overcome they sat down with him in his kingdom, even as he overcame, and sat down with his father in his kingdom. Our difficulties and temptations are of another kind, and arise not from the terrors of persecution, but the snares of prosperity, the cares of life, the perpetual hurries and engagements of secular business, the insatiable thirst of riches, the eager promptings of ambition, the immoderate love of pleasure, and the growing inclination of conformity to the world in all their gratifications, customs, and manners whatsoever. And how fatal are the effects of these dispositions to the interest of all true religion and men's constancy in Christian piety and virtue, wherever they prevail! They make men gradually forgetful of all their best principles, weaken by continual encroachments all their best resolutions, extinguish the worthiest affections of their hearts, suppress those sentiments and convictions of their consciences they once cherished as their treasure and joy, create an indifference to and incapacity for all serious and religious reflections, lessen their regard to all the institutions of piety and devotion, make them
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give way to the amusements and customs of those, who make no profession of Christian godliness, lay them open to innumerable snares, and by chasing away the guards of innocence and virtue, render them impotent and defenceless; or, to sum up all in those affecting words of St. Paul, throw them into such *temptations and snares, those many foolish and hurtful lusts, that pierce them through with many sorrows, and finally overwhelm them in destruction and perdition.* But these things, O ye servants of God! and heirs of immortality, you must *carefully flee, and follow after righteousness, godliness, fidelity, love, patience, and meekness, that fighting this good fight of faith, you may finally lay hold of eternal life**.

They who desert the path of well doing, desert the path that leads to and ends in a glorious and blessed immortality; if they tire and give out, before the race is finished, they renounce all title to the heavenly prize. The Christian race never ends but with life itself, and well doing is the Christian's duty, 'till he is actually put into possession of his reward. And what is there, that can be, in the reason of things, of weight enough to tempt a wise and considerate man, to give over this sacred pursuit of incorruptible glory and blessedness, and abandon that path of well doing, that will bring us finally to the possession of it? Compare *time* and *eternity* together, and the former will appear but as a

* 1 Tim. i. 2, 10, 12.

moment, a mere point in comparison of the latter. Weigh in an impartial balance the glare of wealth, and the shew of riches, and what proportion will there be between these perishing treasures, which may be lost in the pursuit, and which, if obtained, must soon be parted with ; and those which are incorruptible, from which the possessor never dies, and which shall never treacherously forsake, or disappoint the largest expectations of him who gains them. Let ambition pursue its views. Only let us wisely fix the object of it, and carefully regulate the measures of obtaining it. But how low is that ambition, which reaches no higher than the advantages, honours, and interests of a world, the fashion of which is perpetually passing away, and we ourselves as constantly passing out of it ! 'Tis an ambition truly honourable and worthy, that enobles the mind which cherishes it, and that shall sooner or later be gratified in its full extent ; to excell in every thing that is great and good, that imitates the conduct of the eternal God, that aims at the nearest and fairest resemblance to him, that hath for its object his final and publick approbation, the robes of celestial glory, the crown of righteousness, and the reward of life and happiness incorruptible and heavenly. Here thy ambition, Christian, let it be ever so warm and intense, can never be a sin, because the means of gratifying it are prescribed by God, comprehend all the essential duties of human life, and a steady per-

severance in them, throughout all the various stations, circumstances and changes of our present beings, and consist in these things, and in these alone.

This glory, honour and eternal life we must *constantly aim at* in all the virtues we exercise, in all the services of life we engage in, and every good work of christian obedience that we perform. For this is doing them with an eye to *God's glory*, which can never be inconsistent with the happiness of men, and which is best promoted by the diligent discharge of our duty to him, and the endeavour of being finally approved and accepted by him. If it was possible we could separate these things in our own minds, and live the christian life without proposing to ourselves his favour, as the grand inducement to it, it would be an extravagant folly in its nature, a criminal superstition, the greatest excess of distempered enthusiasm, and what would greatly diminish the intrinsic worth of the best services we could perform. To be indifferent to the commendation of God, and the reward of his infinite goodness, is unnatural, and indeed absolutely impossible to one who knows what God is, and under the prevalence of right dispositions and affections to that most excellent and blessed being. No. *To be accepted of God* should be uppermost in our hearts, and the generous ambition, that we should live every day under the powerful influence of. Seeking after glory, honour, and eternal life, is to aim at this blessedness in all we do,
and

and to make all the actions of our lives subservient to our securing it.

If this be our aim, let us farther seek after it, *by cherishing the lively hope and assurance of it*, whilst we continue stedfast in the way of our duty, and *giving all diligence by well doing, to make our calling and election sure*. Take, says the Apostle, *for an helmet the hope of salvation*; and he exhorts the Hebrews, that as *God is not unrighteous to forget their work and labour of love, which they shewed towards his name, they should shew a constant diligence in all the services of goodness to the full assurance of hope to the end, and that this hope they should retain as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which enters within the veil**, hath its fast and firm holding in the very sanctuary of God, where it is impossible it can be moved, or ever fail them. The consciousness of well doing naturally excites somewhat of hope in God; but as he hath connected with it, by the constitution of his own mercy in Christ, the grant of everlasting life and happiness, we should not allow ourselves, whilst *we are stedfast and immovable, and always endeavouring to abound in the work of the Lord*, to suspect or question the readiness of God to fulfill his own promises, and give us eternal life, as the gracious recompence of our faithfully pursuing it. Hope animates to diligence, quickens us to the practice of virtue, renders superior to the difficulties of

* Heb. vi. 10, 11, 19.

our duty, and is one of the best motives to steadfastness in the practice of it.

And finally, by a steady, patient continuance in well doing, we are *increasing our meetness* for, and thereby strengthen the foundation of our title to the inheritance of eternal life, and thereby seeking after it, in the most effectual manner we can possibly take to obtain it. Good dispositions grow stronger and firmer by those actions to which they lead us ; and on the other hand, as those dispositions take deeper root in us, and grow more influential by cultivation and improvement, they heighten the regard to, and increase the ability for all those good works, to which they naturally and powerfully excite us ; so that they reciprocally assist each other, and are mutually subservient to their respective vigour and increase. And how can we more effectually seek after the glory and blessedness of the heavenly world, than by continually increasing our meetness for it, and perfecting those sacred affections of mind, which are the only ones that prevail amongst the happy inhabitants of the celestial regions ? How can we be more directly pursuing the recompence of eternal life and glory, than by abounding in those good fruits of the spirit, and exercising those virtues of the Christian life, to which that recompence is promised and secured ? Every duty we perform from faith in, and love to God and Christ, and every good work that we do, out of obedience to God, and that we may approve

prove ourselves to Christ, is increasing our stock of riches for eternity, and *laying up in store* a more abundant provision *against the time to come*. It proportionably ascertains our title to all the blessings contained in the promises of God, and that have been purchased by Christ for those who believe and obey his gospel. The increase of grace, by increasing purity of heart, visible in the growing holiness, virtue, and usefulness of our lives, is a real advance in true happiness, as it multiplies the inward sources of happiness, and prepares us for the highest advance and full perfection of it. What can we imagine constitutes the felicity of Heaven itself? What, but the utter absence of all unnatural, criminal affections, the full maturity, and the eternal exercise and improvement of all the best and worthiest dispositions, and the being for ever employed in those pure, sacred, benevolent, and friendly services, in which all, without exception, are there engaged; without which Heaven would lose its best joys, and the glories of the place would never render us completely happy. Thus then must you seek after glory, honour, and eternal life, by perpetually cultivating and improving the temper of heart, that is peculiar to that blessed state, into which you hope to be admitted, and living as the inhabitants of it do, and like them, as far as you can unblamable, in the practice of all the great duties of substantial godliness and virtue. Thus will you be advancing towards their perfection, anticipate

participate the joys of Heaven, enter into the genuine work and employments of it, and finally be received as the blessed inhabitants of it yourselves, and have your full share in that *fulnes of joy that is in his presence, and in those pleasures that are at his right hand and last for evermore.*

And indeed this divine connection between patient continuance in well doing, and the immortal glory of a future life, is necessary and immutable. God will give eternal life to Christians of this character, and to them alone. Immortality is no blessing in itself, but as it is well circumstanced, and unless there be a proper disposition for enjoying it. Immortality for the sake of vice, one would think could only be the wish of a devil. Immortality only for the sake of sensual enjoyments, the desire only of a brute. It can in no other view be a real blessing, but as it opens to us an endless pursuit of wisdom and knowledge, as it introduces us into the presence, and secures us the perpetual favour of God our happiness; as it forms us into the most perfect resemblance of his perfection and rectitude, as it is dignified with the peculiar marks of his goodness, raises us above the need and desire of all sensual gratifications, fits us for the society and friendship of perfected spirits, and perpetuates our capacity for loving, serving, and enjoying God, the permanent, eternal source of all perfection and blessedness. Eternity of duration thus endowed is infinitely desirable. “ In the quest
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of such an immortality, by constancy in well doing, under the sacred influence of the principles of truth and righteousness, would I live and die, and I shall never question the power of God, or his readiness and inclination to bestow it. In this search would I wish you to be habitually employed, that you also may share in this *heavenly gift*, and to see you partakers of it will add to my joy, and make Heaven itself to me more sensibly pleasing and delightful."

END of the THIRD VOLUME.

E R R A T A.

Page 40, line 23, for *there* read *these*. p. 64, l. 22, for *wherever* read *whatever*. p. 108 in margin, for *virtuous joys* read *all these delights*. p. 131, l. 6, dele *of*. p. 225, l. 7, for *infidelity* read *infelicity*. p. 239, l. 1, for *immediately* read *mediately*. p. 240, l. 26, for *certantor* read *certainly*. p. 246, l. 1, for *be* read *be*. ditto, l. 8, dele *and*. p. 249, l. 22, for *is* read *are*. p. 250, l. 5, read *after bad, as in this life*. p. 312, l. 25, for *in* read *is*. p. 314, l. 7, dele *for*. p. 356, l. 9, for *which* read *with*. p. 402, l. 11, for *who* read *whom*. p. 405, at bottom, read *diligently*.

2 June 17. To my dear friend, Mr. [Name] [Address] [City] [State] [Country] [Postcode]

1970-1971

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